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HENRY JAMES AND THE CONNOISSEURSHIP OF THE AESTHETIC NOVEL

by

MATTHEW SKELTON ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and
Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1995

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22 June 1995

Art should never try to be popular; the public
should try to make itself artistic.

--Oscar Wilde
The Soul of Man under Socialism

they would have liked him better if he had been
a worse artist

--W. D. Howells (on Henry James)
The Century November 1882

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Henry James and the Connoisseurship of the Aesthetic Novel* submitted by Matthew Skelton in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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24 May 1995

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This thesis is dedicated to my family.

ABSTRACT

Throughout his career, Henry James longed for popular success: he hoped that his novels would receive not only the literary acclaim, but also the financial credit he knew they deserved. In his manipulation of publishers, James was at the forefront of the professionalism of literature which took place during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In my thesis, I argue that James refines his art of fiction by redefining his language of aesthetic sensation and by complicating his representation of character and consciousness. Even as he refashions the form of the novel, he exposes how the contemporary society cheapens aesthetic experience by reducing people and works of art to marketable commodities. Yet, as I argue, James's often uncompromising interest in his own art of fiction enables his works to transcend both their subject matter and their cultural context.

Nevertheless, for James, this distinction was achieved at the cost of unrealised material success.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout the text and notes to refer to these editions:

AC	*The Art of Criticism: Henry James on the Theory and the Practice of Fiction*. Eds. William Veeder and Susan M. Griffin. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986.
AM	*The Ambassadors*. 1909. 2 Vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922.
1883	*The Portrait of a Lady*. 3 Vols. London: Macmillan, 1883.
PL	*The Portrait of a Lady*. 1908. 2 Vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.
RH	*Roderick Hudson*. 1907. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1971.

INTRODUCTION

> 'Literature nowadays is a trade. Putting aside men of genius, who may succeed by mere cosmic force, your successful man of letters is your skilful tradesman. He thinks first and foremost of the markets; when one kind of goods begins to go off slackly, he is ready with something new and appetising. He knows perfectly all the possible sources of income. Whatever he has to sell he'll get payment for it from all sorts of various quarters; none of your unpractical selling for a lump sum to a middleman who will make six distinct profits.' (Gissing 8-9)

This insightful statement, made by Jasper Milvain, the opportunistic young writer in New Grub Street (1891), aptly portrays the professionalism of literature which took place during the latter half of the nineteenth century: the rise of the literary marketplace. The literary "'trade,'" which Jasper identifies and advertises in this passage, resulted from reforms in education and developments in industry. As Joseph McAleer observes, the 1870 Elementary Education Act, which brought elementary education technically "within the reach of every child," helped to create a literate public, which in turn "demanded copious amounts of reading matter.

The fledgling publishing industry boomed in response, and the mass market in 'popular' fiction was born" (13).

While an increased reading public created an expansive new market for fiction, industrialisation provided cheaper and more effective methods of paper production and magazine distribution to meet its demands. The literary marketplace occasioned an unprecedented proliferation of reading matter --from three decker novels to penny dreadfuls and yellow-backs, and from aesthetic little magazines to cheap topical journals, offering titbits of information. While writers, led by Walter Besant, joined The Society of Authors (1883) to learn to protect their literary and economic interests, publishers vied with each other to stimulate, entice, and direct the taste of the public. Booksellers likewise took advantage of the surplus in trade: W. H. Smith and John Menzies each opened railway bookstalls in 1848 and 1857, respectively, to cater to the needs of travellers and to contend with circulating libraries. This commercial and competitive environment surrounded Henry James throughout his life and influenced both the content of his novels and the course of his career. Yet, as I argue in this thesis, even as James yearned for popular success, his interest in aesthetic form--his art of fiction--frequently transcended the concerns of the literary marketplace.

When, in 1873, Henry James first encountered Studies in the History of the Renaissance, he greeted the concerns of its author, Walter Pater, with a mixture of "casual dismissiveness" (Freedman 133) and aesthetic curiosity. As he wrote to his brother William at the time, "I saw Pater's Studies just after getting your letter, in the English bookseller's window: and was inflamed to think of buying it and trying a notice. But I see it treats of several things I know nothing about" (Letters I 391). As Jonathan Freedman points out, James must have either purchased or read a copy of The Renaissance soon after this letter, since he "discussed its essay on Botticelli in the course of a travel essay published in The Independent of June 1874, and was soon to write a novel, Roderick Hudson (1875), that rang with echoes of Pater's text" (133). This ambivalent response is characteristic of James who, during his career, never formally forsook nor absolutely praised the propositions set forth by Pater in The Renaissance. Instead, James preferred to resolve his own reservations about Pater's aestheticism in his novels: he developed and refined in his writing an elaborate aesthetic--the art of his fiction.

Although James never published a critical essay on Walter Pater, as Adeline Tintner observes, "there is enough evidence from his fiction that Studies in the History of the Renaissance had a profound effect on him" (143). Whether or not James was aware, at first, of Pater's "profound effect" on his writing, or whether he knowingly assimilated the language of The Renaissance and consciously refined its ideas, is debatable. What is certain, however, is that James was influenced by Pater, if not (to use a more Paterian expression) "impressed" by his aesthetic creed. Nowhere is this influence more apparent than in James's letter to Edmund Gosse in December 1894, in which James appraises the late Walter Pater in a manner very much attuned to the style of The Renaissance:

> Well, faint, pale, embarrassed, exquisite Pater! He reminds me, in the disturbed midnight of our actual literature, of one of those lucent matchboxes which you place, on going to bed, near the candle, to show you, in the darkness, where you can strike a light: he shines in the uneasy gloom--vaguely, and has a phosphorescence, not a flame. But I quite agree with you that he is not of the little day--but of the longer time. (Letters III 492)

According to Darshan Singh Maini, James employs "all the frills, and not a few of the frivolities, of the aesthetic prose associated with Pater" in this passage--a veritable "kind of *Paterese*" (391). Nevertheless, the judgement he passes on Pater is "remarkably double-edged" (Freedman

135). He echoes the metaphoric language of Pater's "hard, gemlike flame" initially to commemorate Pater and then, ironically, to shed light on his shortcomings. The letter consequently concludes with a complicated vision of Pater. As Jonathan Freedman observes, Pater "may have failed to live up to his own ideal, the passage implies, but such a failure does not vitiate the force or plangency of such an ideal--an ideal that, to follow the letter's allegory through, Pater's phosphorescent example illuminates for those more capable of full aesthetic fire than he" (135). James clearly considered himself to be both a worthy and a combustible candidate to carry on and purify Pater's aesthetic torch.

Unlike Pater, who introduced the late Victorian reader of The Renaissance to an aesthetic appreciation of the passing moment, James derived an aesthetic conclusion of his own in his novels: he synthesised the intense, yet fleeting impressions discussed by Pater into vibrant, highly-wrought works of art. Whereas Pater was never able "to turn away from the temporal flow of reality" (Iser 60) or to "capture the uncatchable nature of experience" in his personal writing (17), James managed to contain diverse and flickering shades of life within pliable artistic frames. The resulting lesson of the Master supplied a germ for Modernism: James not only taught the writers of the early twentieth century how "really to represent life" (AC 166), but he also instructed the aesthetic individual on how to be "one of those people on whom nothing is lost" (AC 173). In the final analysis, the Jamesian style certainly does have what Darshan Singh Maini identifies as a "visionary dimension that lifts it quite beyond the Pateresque horizons" (391).

CHAPTER ONE

THE MASTERFUL NOVICE: JAMES, RODERICK HUDSON, AND THE LANGUAGE OF AESTHETIC SENSATION

By 1875, when Roderick Hudson was first published in America, James was an aspiring writer attuned both to the modes and techniques of popular fiction (Veeder 16) and to an appreciation of art and literature. While he longed to see his name in print and dreamed of commercial success, he also entertained thoughts of becoming a serious writer who would refashion the form of the novel.

James had a long literary apprenticeship: prior to publishing Roderick Hudson he spent ten years writing tales, reviews, and travel sketches, which he collected into A Passionate Pilgrim and Other Tales and Transatlantic Sketches, both published in 1875. Roderick Hudson was his first large work and, as Leon Edel observes, represented James's conscious attempt "to set up shop as a flourishing man of letters" (Letters I 283). The novel arose from mixed motives: James desired to make a career of his writing and, if possible, to achieve fame and fortune; but he also hoped that the novel would be a critical success and that his name would be renowned for good literature.

In the first English edition of Roderick Hudson, James reveals an emerging and discriminating awareness of Pater and The Renaissance as well as a consideration of his own brand of fiction.[1] The young James experiments, first of all, with his protagonists, Roderick Hudson and Rowland Mallet, each of whom he moulds out of different aesthetic clay. In the figure of Rowland, James presents a refined consciousness that collects impressions without actively participating in the experience of acquiring them, while in the character of Roderick, he sculpts the romantic figure of the genius artist who quests uncompromisingly after beauty, but who falls short of his artistic potential. While Rowland seldom surrenders his moral obligations to his sensations, Roderick is consumed, as it were, by a Paterian flame and plunges into hedonistic decadence.

Neither Roderick nor Rowland represents for James an ideal aesthetic type; instead, the young author begins in the 1878 edition of Roderick Hudson to filter the more valuable aesthetic qualities of each character from their impurities and imperfections, anticipating in the process his ultimate creation of Strether in The Ambassadors (1903) --that is, a character of fine discrimination who partakes of (but does not drain) the cup of aesthetic experience.

Whereas James explores the functions of aestheticism in the 1878 edition of Roderick Hudson, he formulates an aesthetic conclusion of his own in the New York Edition (1907). The revisions he makes in the later text exemplify one of the central maxims of The Renaissance. As Pater writes, "'To see the object as in itself it really is,' has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly" (viii). As I argue in this chapter, in the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson, James discriminates the aesthetic impressions of his characters and realises them distinctly in a mature, elaborate style. He replaces such popular, but vague words as "picturesque" and "beautiful"--the vocabulary of the novice novelist--with more precise expressions that at once resonate with aesthetic undertones and strike the keynotes of experience. This more sophisticated craft constitutes, as I have said, the lesson of the Master.

Although James strives in his revisions to catch "the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life" (AC 177), the secular world he describes in his fiction determines the values of experience and character in terms of money and ownership--a concern that recurs throughout James's career. As I argue at the end of this chapter, James scrutinises the cosmopolitan society in Roderick

Hudson and critiques its fashionable commodification of aestheticism.

RODERICK HUDSON: THE DISCARDED MOULD OF GENIUS

James sets his character of Roderick on an aesthetic pedestal in Roderick Hudson in order to appraise the merits and malignancies of his creation. While the figure he cuts of Roderick is exceptionally fine, the character is built of uncertain mettle. As Rowland observes, Roderick is at once refined and rough-hewn, powerful and weak, observant and blind. He best encapsulates the temperament of the young sculptor in his letter to Cecilia:

> 'He is the most extraordinary being, the strangest mixture of qualities. I don't understand so much force going with so much weakness--such a brilliant gift being subject to such lapses. The poor fellow is incomplete, and it is really not his own fault; Nature has given him his faculty out of hand and bidden him be hanged with it! . . . I suppose there is some key or other to his character, but I try in vain to find it; and yet I can't believe that Providence is so cruel as to have turned the lock and thrown the key away.' (237)

As Rowland despairs, Roderick is "'too confoundedly all of one piece; he won't throw overboard a grain of the cargo to save the rest'" (238): he is "'too lax and too tense, too reckless and too ambitious, too cold and too passionate'" (237). He is simply not made of the correct aesthetic proportions.

Roderick assimilates the aesthetic lifestyle of Rome so easily and naturally that he leaves Rowland, as it were, with both his head and his index finger stuck in his guidebook. He displays an instinctive and passionate yearning for aesthetic sensations that is at once superlative and insatiable. Yet, in his quest for impressions, Roderick trespasses beyond the moral boundaries imposed by Rowland and James. He calls for too long a liberal leash. "'An artist can't bring his visions to maturity unless he has a certain experience,'" he proclaims. "'You demand of us to be imaginative, and you deny us the things that feed the imagination. In labour we must be as passionate as the inspired sibyl; in life we must be mere machines. It won't do!'" (192).

Roderick subsequently slips into a shameless crowd of "'parrots and popinjays'" who have "'no more dignity,'" he admits, "'than so many grasshoppers'" (223). But the young artist reaches his penultimate depth of decadence later on, when, like "a parodic version of the Baudelairean dandy" (Freedman 140), he wastes away--albeit sublimely--in his transformed sitting-room: "The carpets and rugs had been removed, the floor of speckled concrete was bare, and lightly sprinkled with water. Here and there, over it, certain strongly odorous flowers had been scattered" (302). Roderick looks dissipatingly pale amidst his chiaroscuro surroundings--like a figure drawn, not by James, but by Beardsley. While he blissfully and lethargically declares that he has never been happier in his life and that he "'can't get up for joy'" (302), all Rowland (and the narrator) can do is stand back aghast. In this scene, as Jonathan Freedman observes, "Roderick yokes aestheticism firmly to moral deficiency and (perhaps even worse, at least for Henry James) creative failure" (141).

James chronicles the decline in Roderick's artistic career--from its apex of discrimination to its decadent collapse--in the young man's sculptures. Like his statue of the symbolic youth who drinks plentifully from the gourd of knowledge, pleasure, and experience at the start of the novel (66), Roderick initially demonstrates an innate inclination for and fine discernment of aesthetic sensations. The first statues he sculpts in Rome are of the highest order: he shapes his figures of Adam and Eve --his purest expressions of beauty--from uncontaminated marble. Yet Roderick falls from his prelapsarian state into a world of debauchery and decadence. Whereas he impetuously tells Gloriani earlier that he cares "'only for perfect beauty'" (123) and that his works should be deemed failures if they do not rise to the level of his Classical conceptions, he comes down to earth almost immediately with his statue of the reclining odalisque. As he despairs, the figure is false from the start and has "'fundamental vices'" (143) that even his art cannot hide. His *lazzarone* is, likewise, "'an image of serene, irresponsible, sensuous life'" that he has "'subtly idealised'" from its "'vile,'" intoxicated model (240). Not surprisingly, Mr. Leavenworth disapproves of the sculpture and chastises the languorous artist: "'Spotless marble should represent virtue,'" he declares, "'not vice!'" (241). The fault of these two statues is not in Roderick's artistic rendering of them; instead, the fault is inherent in their corporeal models. The secular world, James suggests, is incapable of supporting aesthetic ideals.[2]

Earlier in Roderick Hudson, Rowland wonders "whether for men of his companion's large easy power there was not a larger moral law than for narrow mediocrities like himself, who, yielding Nature a meagre interest on her investment (such as it was), had no reason to expect from her this affectionate laxity as to their accounts" (170). James says not, and makes Roderick pay the greatest price of all for his decadent indulgences: the sculptor loses his power of vision. The genius which filled the youth's gourd at the beginning of the novel is spilt. As James relates the last days of Roderick's life, completing a circle of cup symbolism that extends throughout the 1907 New York Edition of Roderick Hudson, the air was charged "as with some rich wasted essence, some spirit scattered by the breaking of its phial and yet unable, for its very quality, to lose itself" (RH 446).[3] Roderick loses his faculty of artistic expression and, without it, seems buried in an open grave. As he remonstrates,

> 'Don't say that he was stupefied and senseless; that his perception was dulled and his aspiration dead. Say that he trembled in every nerve with a sense of the beauty and sweetness of life; that he rebelled and protested and struggled; that he was buried alive, with his eyes open and his heart beating to madness; that he clung to every blade of grass and every wayside thorn as he passed; that it was the most pitiful spectacle you ever beheld; that it was a scandal, an outrage, a murder!' (349)

While Roderick is aware of the beauty surrounding him, he is unable to embrace or express it. His penalty is severe.

Yet this aesthetic epitaph is more eloquent than true. While Roderick demonstrates in his sculptures an exquisite ability "to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, [and] the substance of the human spectacle"

(AC 173), he is not always a figure of fine discrimination. His solipsistic quest for sensations is so extreme that he cannot conceive of the feelings of the other characters. He has no conscience. Just as he accuses Christina Light unfairly of being "'as cold and false and heartless as she is beautiful'" and as having "'sold her heartless beauty to the highest bidder'" (325), so he blindly and mistakenly declares that Rowland has never known the meaning of love or sacrifice (374). He fails, of course, to recognise that Rowland has loved Mary Garland from the start of the novel and that he has sacrificed his own happiness to further Roderick's success. Roderick is, in short, a remorseless egotist (376). Even when he grasps the fact that he has been grotesque, he cares less for his misconduct than for the stain it leaves on the appearance of his character. He cannot live with the knowledge that there is ugliness within him. As Rowland sadly realises, "It was egotism still--aesthetic disgust at the graceless contour of his conduct, but never a hint of simple sorrow for the pain he had given" (379).

Roderick never becomes "'a positive ideal hero'" (RH 415) for James, since he indulges in decadent sensations: the weaknesses in his character pollute his innately fine, intense impressions. As Jonathan Freedman observes, James often associated "excessive self-indulgence [and] creative insufficiency" with aestheticism (135). While James's last word on Roderick, like Rowland's, is not a bad one--"'He was a beautiful fellow!'" Singleton exclaims (386)--James abandons the uncontrollable stamp of genius in his later fiction. Instead, he focuses on figures of fine discrimination (or the reverse when he wishes to expose the commodification of aestheticism in the social marketplace) through whose eyes he reproduces the full complexity of character and experience in his continuous attempt to catch "the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life" (AC 177).

ROWLAND MALLET:
FORGING A DIFFERENT AESTHETIC TEMPERAMENT

James apportions cups of different aesthetic measure to his protagonists. While Roderick's gourd overflows with impressions, which the sculptor greedily drains and James sometimes replenishes, Rowland treats his cup as if it were a dribble glass and debates perpetually from which side to take the first sip. There is some validity to his hesitation: whereas Roderick has an unquenchable thirst for sensations that is never entirely satisfied, Rowland broods over the bouquet of his impressions and savours the colours of his experiences without becoming inebriated.

But Rowland's sobriety also keeps him too often from experiencing the full potential of each moment. Consider, for instance, Rowland's constant reminder to himself to "'Remember to forget Mary Garland'" (120): his nature is an exasperating combination of temptation and abstinence, aesthetic curiosity and moral responsibility. He is, in short, a "walking contradiction" who tries to live for each moment, like Pater's aesthete, yet who is inhibited from a purely contemplative life by his insistence on activity and moral duty (Freedman 137). As Roderick has cause later to exclaim, "'I wish you liked Mary either a little less or a little more'" (280). The conflict between hesitation and impulse becomes so intense for Rowland that it eventually leads "to a state of absolute paralysis in which the urges vigorously to act and merely to be are both so strong that neither action nor passivity is permitted" (Freedman 138).

On several occasions in Roderick Hudson, however, Rowland wrestles with the nerves, needs, and desires that stir like a "'restless demon'" within him (374). On the fewer occasions that he actually allows his itching fingers to "handle forbidden fruit" (354)--when his "conservative instincts" (321) do not interfere--either his actions are extremely awkward or their consequences are negligible. In a scene which closely parallels an earlier incident between Roderick and Christina in the Coliseum, Rowland obtains a flower for Mary Garland. James describes the scene more vibrantly in the New York Edition of the novel than in the original: "Poor Rowland, whose interest in her had so much more nourished itself on plain fare than snatched at any golden apple of reward, enjoyed immensely the sense of her caring for three minutes what should become of him. He was the least brutal of men, but for a moment he was perfectly indifferent to her nerves" (RH 469). When Rowland returns to earth with a flower in his button-hole (hardly Wilde's green carnation), Mary is not at all impressed by his enterprise: "'I wish it were something better!'" she says of the flower, without even a flicker of Christina Light in her character (RH 469). Neither Rowland's motive nor his physical prowess is entirely commendable in this scene.

James nevertheless isolates one aesthetic trait from his characterisation of Rowland that he retains for his future art of fiction: a discriminating consciousness. Although Rowland hesitates fully to embrace the aesthetic potential of each moment, he exhibits a particularly fine discrimination of his impressions. As the narrator records Rowland's appreciation of Rome,

> It was a large, vague, idle, half profitless emotion, of which perhaps the most pertinent thing that may be said is that it brought with it a sort of relaxed acceptance of the present, the actual, the sensuous--

> of life on the terms of the moment. It was perhaps for this very reason that in spite of the charm which Rome flings over one's mood there ran through Rowland's meditations an undertone of melancholy . . . "But afterwards . . . ?" [his thoughts] seemed to ask, with a long reverberation; and he could give no answer but a shy affirmation that there was no such thing as to-morrow and that to-day was uncommonly fine. (159-60)

In its combination of intense momentary joy and brooding melancholy, Rowland's response to his sensations blends many of the keynotes of Pater's aestheticism: he is aware of the flux of time even as he beholds and revels in the impression of the moment. Like Mary Garland, who thinks of the vanity of existence after her sudden awareness of the intense beauty and history of Rome (274), Rowland ponders how all things "moulder and crumble and become dust for the feet and possible malaria for the lungs, of future generations" (159)--a melancholy sentiment that James treats with levity and genuine empathy.

Rowland exhibits a discriminating consciousness in the 1878 edition of Roderick Hudson that James retains for his later fiction. Reappraising Roderick Hudson in his Preface to the New York Edition, James writes,

> It had, naturally, Rowland's consciousness, not to be *too* acute--which would have disconnected it and make [*sic.*] it superhuman: the beautiful little problem was to keep it connected, connected intimately, with the general human exposure, and thereby bedimmed and befooled and bewildered, anxious, restless, fallible, and yet to endow it with such intelligence that the appearances reflected in it, and constituting together there the situation and the "story," should become by that fact intelligible. (RH xvii)

Already, in the character of Rowland Mallet, James displays a consideration of his future aesthetic and anticipates his ultimate creation of Strether in The Ambassadors (1903)--a novel I discuss in my third chapter. Strether is another character with a fine discriminating consciousness, through whose fallible, but remarkable eyes, James renders the gradual unravelling of experience.

PINPOINTING THE LANGUAGE OF AESTHETIC SENSATION: JAMES AND THE NEW YORK EDITION OF RODERICK HUDSON

In the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson (1907), James replaces the vague vocabulary of the novice novelist with precise diction and artful expression. As he writes in his Preface, he has "'nowhere scrupled to re-write a sentence or a passage on judging it susceptible of a better turn'" (RH xiii). His revisions, I argue, exemplify one of Pater's central maxims in The Renaissance: "To define beauty, not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, to find not its universal formula, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of aesthetics" (Renaissance vii-viii). In the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson, consequently, James captures the exact sensations of his characters at fixed moments of experience, often in charged Pateresque language.

James was well-versed in popular fiction when he wrote Roderick Hudson. As William Veeder points out, the young James used the same "extravagant, hollow language" (25) and "ineffectual hyperbole" (31) as the more popular authors of the day. Yet, in the New York Edition of the novel, James downplays his superlatives and replaces such overused words as "beautiful" and "picturesque" with such variants as "rich," "sublime," "romantic," and "virtuous"--adjectives that carry pecuniary connotations, literary echoes, and aesthetic reverberations. He frequently borrows terms from The Renaissance. Whereas Mary Garland displays a "mistrustful shyness" when she arrives in Rome in the 1878 text (269), she experiences a "suddenly-quickened vision" in the 1907 New York Edition (RH 343). Similarly, whereas Rowland's "lately-deepened sympathy and compassion for

Christina was still throbbing" in the early text (325), his "lately quickened interest in Christina had still its fine capacity to throb" in the revised text (RH 431)--a change that combines vitality and passion with refinement.

In the 1878 text of Roderick Hudson, Madame Grandoni is famous for her "pertinent fact[s]" (283); in 1907, she is renowned for her "colloquial plum[s]" (RH 365). James experiences a similar change between the two editions of the novel: he replaces the short, pithy sentences of the original novel with longer witty similes in the New York Edition. Consider the following examples:

> He congratulated Miss Blanchard upon her engagement, and she received his good wishes with a touch of primness. (1878; 287-88)
>
> He congratulated Miss Blanchard upon her engagement, and she received his good wishes as if he had been a servant, at dinner, presenting the potatoes to her elbow. She helped herself in moderation, but also in profile. (1907; RH 372)

And:

> Singleton pocketed his sketch-book with a guilty air, as if it cost his modesty a pang to be detected in his greedy culture of opportunity. (1878; 315)
>
> Singleton pocketed his notes with a guilty air, as if he had been caught picking a rose in a royal

> conservatory or lighting his cigarette at the lamp of a shrine. (1907; RH 413)

These revisions are indeed plum similes: sweet to savour, easy to digest, and yet occasionally containing a pit of symbolism that gives them a further emphasis. One such symbolic revision in the New York Edition records Rowland's first suspicion of the true identity of the Cavaliere:

> Suddenly and vaguely Rowland felt the presence of a new active element in the situation that had been made a drama somehow by Christina's having been made . . . a heroine. It was as if a subordinate performer had suddenly advanced to the footlights. (RH 401)

The second sentence, added to the later text, continues the motif of the "act" put on by the Cavaliere as well as the "show" or "display" assumed by Mrs. Light.

James also makes substantial alterations in the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson that strike the keynotes of experience as well as supply a formula for existence. James, the Master, displays an awareness of aestheticism that moves beyond the sensation of only the passing moment into an active pursuit of an ideal aesthetic lifestyle. Consider the turn around James makes in Mary Garland's observation of the moonlit night at the Villa Pandolfini:

> "It's a night to remember when one is dying!" (341)

> "It's a night that makes a success . . . of one's having lived at all." (RH 455)

There is undoubtedly a greater sense of life, a vital celebration of existence, in the later New York Edition than the tone of fatalism or of loss and regret in the previous version. As Rowland declares in a speech that remains almost unaltered in both editions,

> 'To be young and eager [elastic], and yet old enough and wise enough to discriminate and reflect, and to come to Italy for the first time--that's one of the greatest pleasures life has to offer. It's but right to remind you of it, so that you may make the most of your chances and not accuse yourself later of having wasted the precious season.' (RH 326-27; 1878 259)

As Rowland realises, in the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson, the "'real *taste* of life'" is a complex mixture of the finest and subtlest impressions, a combination of joy and suffering, happiness and loss (RH 457).

In the revised New York Edition of Roderick Hudson, James pinpoints the sensations of his characters in distinct language. In this later edition, Rowland feels "a repetition of discreet and intense finger-taps" press upon his heart (RH 402), but in the earlier edition he merely feels "something acutely touching" (307). Even more noticeable is Christina's observation of Mary Garland in the New York Edition, in which she supplies a useful and haunting image, full of depth and mystery, to counteract the superficial conception of beauty: "'If a woman's not to scream out from every pore that she has an appearance--which is a most awful fate--quite the best thing for her is to carry *that* sort of dark lantern. On occasion she can flash it as far as she likes'" (RH 379). In the earlier text, Christina speaks more in terms of "prettiness," "vulgarity," and "beauty" (292). Still more striking in the revised text is her next comment on Mary: "'She looks magnificent when she glares--like a Medusa crowned not with snakes but with a tremor of doves' wings'" (RH 381). This is possibly the most stunning image that James adds to the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson, utterly displacing Christina's comment in the 1878 text that Mary "'looks very handsome when she frowns'" (293).

James, in the New York Edition, elevated the style of Roderick Hudson to the level of his mature aesthetic, but in so doing, made the novel less popular with the reading public. As Hélène Harvitt complains, the effect of his revisions "is an obscuring of spontaneous, natural passages, making them labored, heavy, ambiguous, and sometimes almost impenetrable. There is a feeling of effort, of deliberate striving for effect which spoils the youthful production and robs it of what was fresh and easy and sincerely unaffected" (227). G. K. Chesterton likewise attacks James's "Hampered or Obstacle Race Style, in which one continually trips over commas and relative clauses; and where the sense has to be perpetually qualified lest it should mean too much" (229-30).

James spurned the "*unintelligence*" of these reviewers (Letters II 250) who, like Mrs. Wister in the North American Review, preferred the melodramatic climax in Roderick Hudson to the absence of plot elsewhere in the novel (Gard 41). As James realises in his preface to the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson, the time-scheme in the novel is "quite inadequate" for his artistic ambitions and quickens disproportionately towards the end, accelerating Roderick's demise without the proper motivation (xiii-xiv). Yet James could not rely upon his audience to share his own artistic judgement. As he writes to Robert Louis Stevenson in 1887, differentiating between his own aesthetic concerns and the literary market,

> [Roderick Hudson] is a book of considerable good faith, but I think of limited skill. Besides, directly my productions are finished, or at least thrust out to earn their living, they seem to *me* dead. They dwindle when weaned--removed from the parental breast, and only flourish, a little, while imbibing the milk of my plastic care. (Letters III 206)

In this passage, James distinguishes between the artistic concerns which animate his writing and the public taste which, seldom appreciative of his craft, seemed to deaden his literary innovations. Considering James's refinement of his style in the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson, therefore, and considering his criticism of the secular world in the novel, which I shall now discuss, it is not surprising that his works were unpopular in the literary marketplace.

THE COMMODIFICATION OF AESTHETICISM: RODERICK HUDSON AND THE SECULAR WORLD

A common interpretation of Roderick Hudson and James's other early novels is that James focuses almost exclusively on the clash between American and European cultures. As James Tuttleton observes, "the spectacle of the American's 'assimilation' of Europe was rich ground" for James in the mid-1870s, since he "had seen hundreds of American travelers giving Europe the once-over but managing to miss any real experience of its complex culture--treating it 'as a vast painted and gilded holiday toy, serving its purpose on the spot and for the time, but to be relinquished, sacrificed, broken and cast away, at the dawn of any other convenience'" (105).

This temporary possession of Europe by American tourists presents its own form of aesthetic commodification --one which James considers in Roderick Hudson with obvious distaste. There are two references to tourists in the novel, one which suggests their brutishness and the other which emphasises their lack of aesthetic distinction. The narrator celebrates, first of all, the departure of the "great herd of tourists" who detract from the nobility of Rome (270) and observes, secondly, that Florence gives "forth its aesthetic aroma with a larger frankness" once "perfectly void of travellers" (339).

Mr. Leavenworth is in a different position: although he is yet another American tourist, his wealth allows him not only to view the sights of Europe, but also to purchase its culture. He is a collector. In the 1878 edition of Roderick Hudson, accordingly, Mr. Leavenworth commissions an "'allegorical representation of Culture'" (173), while in the New York Edition, he opts, instead, for the "'idea of Intellectual Refinement'" (RH 193). These two conceptions are close in meaning, but are not synonymous: whereas the semblance of "Culture" may be culled from an accumulation of objects, the nobler figure of "Intellectual Refinement" demands an aesthetic consideration, or at least a partial knowledge, of these acquisitions and depends upon how well they are displayed. Needless to say, in either case, Mr. Leavenworth's conception is a fraudulent allegorical figure that, in the words of Roderick, sits "'on an india-rubber cushion, with a pen in her ear and the lists of the stock exchange in her hand'" (174; RH 195)--an aesthetically cheap, but financially expensive emblem of the reification of art that James exposes in his fiction.

But, without any doubt, the most spectacular, secular character that James exposes in Roderick Hudson is Mrs. Light, who commodifies her daughter, Christina, by making her an object in the marriage marketplace.

MRS. LIGHT AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF CHRISTINA

In Roderick Hudson, James combines circus buffoonery and church imagery to criticise the members of society who idolise money and sacrifice originality at the altar of the marketplace. Mrs. Light is one such congregant at the mass who makes a religion of the market and an icon of her daughter. She progresses through the novel with great fanfare: as Rowland and Roderick witness her first appearance at the Villa Ludovisi, she is like a ringmaster pushing her entourage through social hoops. She leads an absurd parade that includes a freak (the Cavaliere), a cynosure (Christina) and a trained animal--a ridiculous pink-fleeced poodle that is "combed and decked like a ram for sacrifice" (RH 94). Her forced entrance into society is no less flamboyant. As Madame Grandoni speaks of Mrs. Light's self-made success,

> 'She has opened her booth at the fair; she has her great natural wonder to show, and she beats her big drum outside. Her big drum is her *piano nobile* in a great palace, her brilliant equipage, her marvellous bonnets, her general bedizenment, and the phenomenon in the booth is her wonderful daughter. Christina's a better "draw" than the two-headed calf or the learned pig.' (RH 196)

James's derision in this passage is evident: he likens Christina to a circus curiosity to expose how Mrs. Light and the cosmopolitan society denigrate her humanity and reduce her character to a commodity, an item to be bartered in the Barnumised marketplace.

Mrs. Light likewise performs her perfunctory devotions to society by marketing her daughter as a marriageable commodity. As the narrator chronicles her fetishism,

> Mrs. Light evidently at an early period had gathered her maternal and social appetites together into a sacred parcel, to which she said her prayers and burnt incense--which she treated generally as a sort of fetish. These things had been her religion; she had none other. . . . (RH 248)

Such irreverent rituals, James reveals, are neither profitable nor spiritually rewarding. He continues:

> The poor old fetish had been so caressed and manipulated, so thrust in and out of its niche, so passed from hand to hand, so dressed and undressed, so mumbled and fumbled over, that it had lost by this time much of its early freshness and seemed a rather battered and disfeatured divinity. (RH 249)

The repetitive structure of this passage recreates the mishandling of Christina as she is passed from person to person, hand to hand, until she becomes "a rather battered and disfeatured divinity"--a bruised and increasingly sceptical social icon. Mrs. Light nevertheless continues to make an object of her daughter. As James writes, "she considered that she had been performing a pious duty in bringing up Christina to carry herself, 'marked' very high and in the largest letters, to market" (RH 249).

Mrs. Light splendidly embodies the tawdriness and irreverence of the marketplace in Roderick Hudson. Despite the superfluousness of her gestures and ornaments, she is at best a superficial character ruled only by appearances. "'We make debts for clothes and champagne,'" Christina tells Rowland, "'but we can't spend a sou on our poor benighted minds'" (RH 210). Just as there is no depth to Mrs. Light's furbelows, so there is little distinction in her tastes. As Rowland notices when Mrs. Light enters Roderick's studio, she "was looking a little at everything and at nothing as if she saw it" (RH 155). There is an immense difference between looking and seeing in James's fiction: the society he condemns observes, without knowing, and purchases, without appreciating, the objects of the marketplace. Needless to say, Mrs. Light is a figure of little discernment who is motivated more by bank balances and social reputation than by her own artistic discrimination: she is, by far, a better judge of rank and wealth than of aesthetic value. During her visit to the studio, she consequently mistakes Roderick's Adam for a gladiator and his Eve for a gypsy. She reserves her scrutiny, instead, for Rowland, whom she eyes all over and surveys from head to foot (RH 155). In the secular world of James's fiction, money becomes the most concrete definition of beauty and worth, thereby upsetting Pater's central tenet "of the quickened, multiplied consciousness" (Renaissance 238) and James's own elaborate literary technique.

It is hardly surprising given James's intricate portrayal of Christina Light in Roderick Hudson, that he redefines his vocabulary in the New York Edition of the novel fully to appreciate the depth of her character. Christina is a lexicon of popular language and aesthetic tastes. Even if she, herself, does not subscribe to "'the vulgarity of the taste of the rabble'" (RH 379), she understands its rhetoric. As she announces, for example, "'Prettiness is terribly vulgar nowadays, and it's not every one that knows just the sort of ugliness that's amusing. However, there are more people now that are horridly knowing than not--and the only nice thing, I think really, is to be as ignorant as a fish'" (RH 167). Her declaration is characteristically brazen and equivocal: she is not "'as ignorant as a fish'" and never can be. Yet, like James, Christina recognises how fashionable jargon becomes meaningless from constant repetition.

Christina is an exceptional character: just as she chooses her words strategically for their dramatic effect, so she is neither satisfied nor enamoured by ordinary praise. After Rowland implores her to leave Roderick alone, she asks him whether she will be doing "'something magnanimous, heroic, sublime, something with a fine name like that'" if she consents (RH 288). Rowland carefully considers his response. As James writes,

> Rowland, elated with the prospect of gaining his point, was about to reply that she would deserve the finest name in the world; but he instantly suspected that this tone would n't please her. Besides, it would n't express his meaning. "You do something I

> shall greatly respect," he contented himself with saying. (RH 288)

Respect is a valuable commodity in James's fiction--a sentiment that is not often felt and that is seldom used, especially in connection with Christina Light. She is uncharacteristically quiet, therefore, after Rowland's response: her silence registers the importance of his sentence and signals her satisfaction with his opinion. In his attempt to approach a closer appreciation of Christina, Rowland (like James) rejects the popular--cheap--language of the cosmopolitan world.

In the next chapter I argue that, just as James pinpoints his language of experience and aesthetic sensation in Roderick Hudson, so he delves into the consciousness of Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady and shows how her character refuses to be framed or owned. I begin, however, by briefly exploring James's characterisation of Christina Light in Roderick Hudson. I argue that James ultimately reveals how no one word can signify or fully appreciate the complex portrait he draws of her character.

CHAPTER TWO

MOVING PORTRAITS: CHRISTINA LIGHT, ISABEL ARCHER, AND THE CONNOISSEURSHIP OF CHARACTER

As I argue at the end of the first chapter, James, in the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson (1907), elaborates aesthetic sensation by replacing what Matthiessen calls "aesthetic catch-all[s]" (154)--words whose meanings are obscured by constant repetition--with qualifying phrases and images that exactly capture a moment or an impression. Just as James represents aesthetic experience in the most precise language possible, so he portrays the minds of his characters in all of their most complicated and subtle shades. As he observes in his preface to the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson, the centre of interest throughout the novel is not in Roderick's quick demise, but in Rowland Mallet's consciousness: the drama of the novel "is the very drama of that consciousness" and needs to be sufficiently acute "in order to enable it, like a set and lighted scene, to hold the play" (xvii). Yet at the same time that James refines his art of fiction by delving into the consciousness of character and by pinpointing the language of aesthetic sensation, he exposes how the contemporary society cheapens or vulgarizes experience and human nature by reducing them to commodities to be bought and sold in the social marketplace. Money becomes the sole criterion of beauty and worth in the cosmopolitan world of James's fiction.

In this chapter, I shall examine the verbal portraits that James draws of Christina Light and Isabel Archer within the context of the social marketplace. While Isabel, at the end of The Portrait of a Lady (1881), seems to be "ground in the very mill of the conventional" (PL II 415), her spirit is inextinguishable and even brightens in adversity. Whereas Christina plays the familiar role of the *femme fatale* in the early edition of Roderick Hudson, she becomes a more enigmatic and substantial player in the New York Edition. In each novel, James distinguishes the individualism of his heroines, with whom he sympathises, from the sophistication of society. Yet, as I argue in this chapter, no amount of money can purchase the original stamps of his characters. While James acknowledges the determinant forces of the external world in his fiction, he also demonstrates how the intricate minds of his characters can neither be known nor be appreciated properly by society. The portraits he draws of his characters transcend their social frames.

THE STATE OF THE LITERARY MARKETPLACE:
JAMES AND PUBLISHING

Throughout most of his career, James depended upon the profits of his serialised fiction to buy "the freedom and leisure" necessary to write his longer and more consciously artistic novels (Letters II 205). By his own admission, these more sophisticated works were never as popular nor as successful as his "inferior" and "rather . . . shameless" pot-boilers (Letters IV 88). As he wrote to his brother, William, as early as 1872,

> [I] must give up the ambition of ever being a free-going and light-paced enough writer to please the multitude. The multitude, I am more and more convinced, has absolutely no taste--none at least that a thinking man is bound to defer to. To write for the few who have is doubtless to lose money--but I am not afraid of starving. (Gard 27)

Nevertheless, at the beginning of his career, as at the end, James also recognised that it was also impossible "'to live on air indefinitely'" (Anesko 5). The pot-boiler, he decided, might thus represent, "'in the lives of all artists, some of the most beautiful things ever done by them'" (5).

Even before the publication of Roderick Hudson, James exhibited more than a peripheral interest in the financial returns of his writing. His letters are full of statistics and earnings: he writes frequently of his profits, a large proportion of which he sent to his parents to reimburse them for their investment in his literary apprenticeship. While he expresses an obvious and anxious interest in the critical reception of his first work, he also desires earnestly that it will be a financial success: "I also make over to the family the full profits, such as they may be, of _Roderick_ _Hudson_," he writes, "in return for its advances" (_Letters_ II 13).

Demonstrating an astute and precocious manipulation of the publishing industry, James was at the forefront of the change in the relationship between authors and publishers in the literary marketplace. He was dissatisfied, early on, with the (unspoken, unwritten, but understood) half-profits contract that traditionally existed between author and publisher: by this contract, the publisher agreed to share the profits from book sales with an author once the costs of production and distribution (often exaggerated) had been recovered. Because publishing firms balanced their accounts once or twice a year, and because payments were not made for an additional four months, authors seldom saw any financial returns from their writing. James wisely began to request the more common American guarantee of royalties and advances against royalties in order to finance his writing. As Michael Anesko writes, James's career as a writer was shaped, not just by his aesthetic endeavours, but also by the "economic forces that were transforming the Anglo-American literary marketplace in the latter half of the nineteenth century":

> The rapid rise and expansion of the reading public, the proliferation of periodicals, and the development of the modern publishing firm all contributed to the making of Henry James; the shape of his career parallels (and, in some respects, anticipates) the transformation of literature's status in the culture at large. Even though James was among the first observers to recognize the commercialization of literature that, by the end of the century, was so widely deplored, his own behavior in the marketplace effectively demonstrates the changing nature of the literary vocation. (33)

James quickly learned from his mistakes in the market. Having invested $555 for stereotype plates in _Transatlantic Sketches_ (1875), which he did not recover until 1906, James refused to pay for such plates again (Anesko 5). Moreover, when _The American_ was pirated before he could arrange for its publication in England in 1877, James was exceedingly careful thereafter to secure his copyright in both countries. He arranged for his novels and tales to appear in print simultaneously, or as close together as possible, on both sides of the Atlantic. Echoing Shylock, in his demand for his bond, James reminded William Dean Howells in 1880 that "It is only by your publishing [The Portrait of a Lady] a fortnight after Macmillan, rather than a fortnight before, that I can secure the English copyright: an indispensable boon. . . . I have taken out the American copyright and will have my pound of flesh from whomsoever infringes it" (Letters II 299).

As an American writer in England, James anticipated the movement for International Copyright (1891) by more than a decade. As an earnest, but uncompromising author in the literary marketplace, his manipulation of publishers and contracts set a precedent for future generations of novelists--even though Walter Besant complained that James considered his works more for their literary worth than for their financial value (Keating 47). In subsequent years, following the initial success of his "international theme," which highlights the cultural differences between Americans and Europeans, James began to pit publisher against publisher in an attempt to capitalise on his popularity and to choose the highest offer. Following the decline in demand for his fiction between 1885 and 1895, he began to concentrate, instead, almost exclusively on aesthetic form, creating the masterpieces of his major phase.

CHRISTINA LIGHT AND THE COMMODIFYING GLAZE

In an important scene in Roderick Hudson, just after Roderick has finished sculpting her bust, Christina asks Rowland to appraise her character. As she asks him, how does he judge her? What does the sculpture of her bust represent? When he stumblingly responds that the statue "'represents a young lady whom [he] should n't pretend to judge off-hand,'" she taunts him. As she equivocates, "'You're either very slow or I'm very deep'" (RH 181). Both answers are, to a certain extent, true. But what I think James really questions in this scene is whether it is possible to differentiate Christina's private character from her social replica. As I argue, James deliberately complicates his portrait of Christina in the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson to make the solution to this conundrum impossible. Christina Light becomes a complex amalgam of worldliness and integrity--a figure of confused aesthetic and moral sensibilities--who is at once a product of, and an exception to, the society she inhabits. She is a blemished, yet sincere martyr of the marriage market-place, whose value (a suitably vague word, I think, which is open to financial, moral, and artistic considerations) eludes capture.

Christina Light exhibits so many faces in Roderick Hudson that her character can never fully be known. As

Roderick, smitten, exclaims, "'She's never the same, and you never know how she'll be. And it's not for a pose--it's because there are fifty of her'" (RH 187). Whereas the cosmopolitan society tries to assimilate Christina's character, James and Roderick each assert her vitality. They appreciate what the world, in contrast, deadens: her individualism. Yet, as Christina regrets, "'We make the most inconvenient good impression on people we don't care for; we inspire with loathing those we do'" (RH 381).

Christina is difficult to decipher. As Madame Grandoni states, she is an actress who believes in her part while she is playing it, but who never "'means all she says [nor], by a great deal, says all she means'" (RH 198). Rowland similarly discerns that she is not so candid as she pretends to be (RH 284); "in this young lady's deportment," the narrator notes, "the flower was apt to be one thing and the perfume another" (RH 376).

Of all the characters in Roderick Hudson, however, Rowland, alone, fully appreciates the complexity of Christina's character. The best way to describe her, he finds, is by contrarieties. As he writes to his cousin Cecilia,

> 'She's one of the great beauties of all time and worth coming barefoot to Rome, like the pilgrims of old, to see. Her complexion, her eyes, her step, the planting

> and the mass of her dusky tresses, may have been seen before in a goddess on a cloud or a nymph on a Greek gem, but never in a mere modern girl. . . . She is corrupt, perverse, as proud as a potentate, and a coquette of the first magnitude; but she's intelligent and bold and free, and so awfully on the lookout for sensations that if you set rightly to work you may enlist her imagination in a good cause as well as in a bad.' (RH 296-297)

By acting as a connoisseur in this passage and appraising her character, Rowland objectifies Christina Light as a work of art, a painting on the wall, and a relic worthy of a pilgrimage. Rowland's conception of Christina is, in fact, very similar to Walter Pater's appreciation of *La Gioconda* (*Mona Lisa*) in The Renaissance:

> Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come," and the eyelids are a little weary. It is beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. . . . All the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there. . . . (Renaissance 124-25)

From her "'dusky tresses'" to her enigmatic demeanour, Christina resembles the *Mona Lisa*. She even has an ageless appearance. While Rowland suggests that her complexion "'may have been seen before in a goddess on a cloud or a nymph on a Greek gem,'" Christina herself proclaims, "'I'm not young; I've never been young! . . . I was a little wrinkled old woman at ten'" (RH 279). Like the *Mona Lisa*, Christina is "older than the rocks among which she sits" (Renaissance 125).

Just as Leonardo da Vinci, Pater claims, perfected "the art of going deep, [and] of tracking the sources of expression to their subtlest retreats" (Renaissance 104), so James delves into the character of Christina Light and skilfully reproduces the variegated palette of her temperaments. He masterfully creates a *sfumato* portrait that is, I think, as complex and as haunting as the *Mona Lisa*.

James displays his heightened awareness of language and character when Christina asks Rowland for the second time in the novel what he thinks of her. The episode concludes Chapter XX in which Christina justifies her reasons for calling off her engagement to the Prince Casamassima: she does not love the Prince, she declares, and will not sell her soul for all the Casamassima diamonds (RH 407). Christina displays an unfamiliar shade of her chameleonic character in this scene: she is sincere. And it is here in the novel, I argue, that James ultimately reveals how no one word can signify or fully appreciate

Christina Light. When Christina asks Rowland to appraise her character, he simply turns his back to her with the understanding that she knows already what he thinks. Whereas he pronounces her "'an excellent girl!'" in the earlier version of _Roderick Hudson_ (312), in the New York Edition he does not reply. As James writes,

> Madame Grandoni had insisted on the fact that she was an actress, and this little speech seemed a glimpse of the cothurnus. She had played her great scene, she had made her point, and now she had her eye at the hole in the curtain and she was watching the house. But she blushed as she guessed his fine comment, and her blush, which was beautiful, carried off her betrayal. He turned his back. (_RH_ 410)

Rowland and Christina converse beyond the surface level of words in the New York Edition of _Roderick Hudson_. Their feelings escape the boundaries of expression. The "'excellent girl!'" of the previous edition seems to lose its meaning by comparison: the adjective is too large and too common to applaud or to appreciate the originality of Miss Light. Christina is so complex and evinces so many responses in her audience that no single word can contain or express her exceptional character. She escapes both the limitations of language and the imprisonment of definition. The absence of a definitive statement on her character paradoxically bespeaks the greatest tribute to Christina's originality.

Unfortunately, in Roderick Hudson, Christina is bought against her will by the agents of society. She is sold as a commodity to the Prince Casamassima and becomes as hard and as superficial as the society she is intended to ornament. As she tells Rowland, late in the novel,

> 'I hope we may never meet again! . . . You've seen me at my best. I wish to tell you solemnly, I *was* sincere. . . . You know at any rate I did my best. It would n't serve; I was beaten and broken; they were stronger than I. Now it's another affair!
>
> '. . . You remember I told you that I was in part the world's and the devil's. Now they've taken me all. It was their choice; may they never repent!' (RH 492-493)

But the society does not know or value the true Christina; indeed, it is impossible to own her character. As Roderick reconsiders her towards the end of the novel,

> 'It was the wonderful nature of her beauty . . . It was all her beauty--so fitful, so alive, so *subject to life*, yet so always there and so interesting and so splendid. . . . What befooled me was to think of it as my own property and possession--somehow bought and paid for.' (RH 482)

The portrait James draws of Christina Light transcends its social frame.

James makes one more significant revision in Roderick Hudson. Whereas Madame Grandoni tells Rowland in the first edition that she pities Christina (286), she stresses in the New York Edition that "'we must n't, all the same, . . . give her up'" (RH 369). James certainly does not give Christina up. As he recollects in his preface to the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson, he felt tremendous sadness at having launched the Princess Casamassima, so full of life, into the commodified, dead world:

> I desired as in no other such case I can recall to preserve, to recover the vision; and I have seemed to myself in re-reading the book quite to understand why. The multiplication of touches had produced even more life than the subject required, and that life, in other conditions, in some other prime relation, would still have somehow to be spent. Thus one would watch for her and waylay her at some turn of the road to come-all that was to be needed was to give her time. This I did in fact, meeting her again and taking her up later on. (RH xx)

James writes, of course, of The Princess Casamassima (1886) in which Christina reappears--separated from her husband, tired of her banal social existence, and still a complex temptress. James's portrait of Christina Light in Roderick Hudson is clearly richer and more vibrant than the ornament society makes of her: her character also transcends the physical confines of the book.

MORE THAN JUST A MERE OUTLINE: ISABEL ARCHER

In The Portrait of a Lady, James chronicles the acculturation of Isabel Archer as she passes from innocence and independence to experience and enclosure. Her vocabulary changes with her increased knowledge of the world: she progresses from the simple language of romance novels to the learned *doubles entendres* of society. But as she assumes both the language and tone of society, she is sapped of her individuality. Her character is masked by convention and loses its vitality. Yet Isabel refuses to be defined by her possessions: she is unwilling to become an advertisement either for her husband or for the world. Like Christina Light before her, she is so strong--and the portrait James draws of her character so complex--that she defies being known or framed.

ISABEL'S CHANGING VOCABULARY

Isabel arrives at Gardencourt with her head full of romantic ideas and her vocabulary fashioned after novels. She immediately calls Ralph's terrier "'a perfect little darling'" (PL I 17) and pronounces the house "'too enchanting'" (PL I 18). The presence of Lord Warburton, moreover, frames the scene perfectly: "'Oh, I hoped there would be a lord,'" she cries; "'it's just like a novel!'" (PL I 18). The abundance of adjectives and exclamation marks in her early declarations characterises her inexperience and enthusiasm.

Isabel betrays her ignorance, furthermore, by trying neither to appear nor to sound naive. When she meets the Misses Molyneux, for example, she praises the "most original stamp" of their characters, despite the narrator's polite aside that "there were fifty thousand young women in England who exactly resembled them" (PL I 104). Once she hears of Lord Warburton's indecisive radicalism, moreover, she proclaims, "'Oh, I do hope they'll make a revolution!'" (PL I 100). Her attempt to qualify this opinion only confirms her callowness:

> 'In a revolution--after it was well begun--I think I should be a high, proud loyalist. One sympathises more with them, and they've a chance to behave so exquisitely. I mean so picturesquely.' (PL I 100)

James paces this passage comically. In her attempt to correct the inaccuracy of her word choice, Isabel proceeds from one superlative, but vague adverb to another. Her explication paradoxically reveals her inexperience. The meanings of her words, if not their effect, are lost upon her audience. "'I don't know that I understand what you mean by behaving picturesquely,'" her uncle admits, "'but it seems to me that you do that always, my dear'" (PL I 101). As Mary Cross argues in The Contingencies of Style, Isabel, at the beginning of The Portrait, is "full of native curiosity, questions and wide-eyed exclamations"--"the verbal equivalent of her innocence" (48).

Coupled with Isabel's romantic vocabulary is her ignorance of the world; by her own admission, she knows nothing about money (PL I 34). Just as she reads books more for their frontispieces than for their topics, so she has little inclination to look outside her grandmother's library--once a functional office--to assure herself that the "vulgar street" lies beyond: "this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side," the narrator explains, "a place which became to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of terror" (PL I 30-31). When Mrs. Touchett advises pulling down the house and letting "'shops to great advantage'" in its place, Isabel passionately replies that history is priceless and cannot be sold. "'I like places in which things have happened--even if they're sad things,'" she argues. "'A great many people have died here; the place has been full of life'" (PL I 34). Isabel cares very little for the concerns of the world. As her Aunt Lydia exclaims, she has "'the vaguest ideas about . . . earthly possessions'" (PL I 290).

As Isabel's knowledge of the world increases, her reliance upon literature to supply an interpretative text lessens. Whereas novels are her "source of interest and even of instruction" early in The Portrait (PL I 42), the emerging narrative of her own life quickly usurps the precedence of the printed page. As the narrator writes, shortly after her arrival at Gardencourt, "Of late, it was not to be denied, literature had seemed a fading light" to Isabel (PL I 140). That a letter from Caspar Goodwood, professing his persistent love, follows this declaration emphasises the fact that she is living the role of a romantic heroine. She reads his letter--a page from her own life--rather than an external, depersonalised text taken from the shelf. That Lord Warburton proposes in the chapter immediately following this scene again emphasises the fact that her life is like a script, an unfolding drama.

As the novel continues, the narrator chronicles how Isabel more and more frequently reads words other than those in literature (PL I 215): she retouches the narrative of her own life with glosses that either rethink or rework past episodes and dialogues--adding always to her metafictional text. Not surprisingly, near the end of The Portrait, when Isabel returns to Gardencourt, the narrator declares that "she had never been less interested in literature" (PL II 424). Isabel has seen and experienced so much of life that she does not need a book to interpret its mysteries. Yet even here, as I shall argue, James reveals how only one segment of Isabel's life has been written; many more volumes remain to be told.

Isabel assumes the sophisticated codes of society as her awareness of the world increases; her vocabulary progresses from simple romantic exaggeration to duplicitous sarcasm. As Mary Cross argues in The Contingencies of Style, James manifests her semiotic change by "verbal recycling" (52): he structures the novel on "repetition, parallelism, and embedding" (52) so that words can be "recontextualised and redefined" (55) as her knowledge of their functional and social uses improves. Isabel adopts the words, if not the tone, of society early in the novel by mimicking Madame Merle. Just as the older lady declares that "'Justice'" is all she expects from the world (PL I 283), so Isabel heroically tells Ralph, after she inherits a fortune from his father, that all she wants is "'to be treated with justice'" (PL I 318). Her declaration echoes Madame Merle's previous plea. Yet whereas Madame Merle tries to hide the blemishes in her character from society, Isabel emphasises her own faults. Thinking she is too highly appraised by others, she sets out to remind her audience of her weaknesses and imperfections.

Her motives become less flattering and more insincere as her disappointments accumulate and her knowledge of the world increases. Whereas she speaks earnestly and inaccurately early in The Portrait, she talks covertly and uses masked words as the novel continues. As the narrator regrets, Isabel learns caution (PL II 179). She smiles "vaguely" at Ned Rosier, for example, when he requests her help in his unsuccessful courtship of Pansy (PL II 106). Her vagueness is a screen that partly suppresses her disillusionment with married life and partly expresses her growing indifference. Worse still, Isabel becomes sarcastic and even "strangely cynical" (PL II 175). As she tells Madame Merle with a razor-sharp wit that suits the older lady better than Isabel, Rosier "'has about the extent of one's pocket-handkerchief--the small ones with lace borders'" (PL II 167). Isabel is ashamed of her ill humour, however, and makes up for her sarcasm by defending the hapless suitor. "'He's very kind, very honest,'" she observes, "'and he's not such a fool as he seems'" (PL II 168). Nevertheless, there is a change in her character that Ralph readily identifies:

> Certainly she had fallen into exaggerations--she who used to care so much for the pure truth; and whereas of old she had a great delight in good-humoured argument, in intellectual play (she never looked so charming as when in the genial heat of discussion she received a crushing blow full in the face and brushed it away as a feather), she appeared now to think there was nothing worth people's either differing about or agreeing upon. (PL II 143)

Whereas Isabel is curious of old, Ralph concludes that "now she [is] indifferent" (PL II 143). The travesty in her change of character, however, is her hypocrisy. When Isabel tells Pansy not to disobey her father by encouraging Rosier, her face is "hideously insincere" (PL II 257). The greatest price she has to pay Gilbert Osmond in The Portrait is the cost of her integrity.

THE MASKS AND SCREENS OF SOCIETY

Just as Isabel gradually acquires the sophisticated *doubles entendres* of society, so she adopts a mask of convention and tries, like Madame Merle before her, to keep her private misfortunes from the scrutiny of others. She tries to disguise her unhappiness by acting as "the most light-hearted of women" (PL II 293). But her screens neither deceive nor allay the suspicions of her spectators.

Even Pansy sees through her mask. As the diminutive child simply tells her, "'You're not happy, Mrs. Osmond'" (PL II 384). When Caspar Goodwood similarly declares, but without the same certainty, that Isabel "'conceal[s] everything'" and that he cannot approach an understanding of her, she ironically responds that he "'come[s] very near'" to her disingenuousness (PL II 318).

Unfortunately, Isabel misinterprets the kind intentions of her admirers. At the same time that she most suspects them of calling her bluff, they are really the most disinterested and wish to help her. She drops her façade just briefly when she alludes to her need for help (PL II 249) and confesses that she is wretched (PL II 284); each glimpse of her old sincerity restores the hope in her friends that she will return to her former self. But while Isabel continues to be "'ground in the very mill of the conventional'" (PL II 415), the change in her character--exemplified by her modified vocabulary and her masks--can hardly be called attractive. As Lord Warburton tells Isabel on seeing her again, "'Do you know that you're changed--a little? . . . I don't mean for the worse, of course; and yet how can I say for the better?'" (PL II 126). For the first time in the novel, he is neither eloquent nor decisive.

ECONOMIC LANGUAGE: THE VOICE OF SOCIETY

The cosmopolitan world that James critiques in The Portrait has its own pecuniary language which objectifies characters and reduces them to marketable commodities. As Peggy McCormack writes in The Rule of Money, "just as money is a universal equivalent into which all other commodities must be translated to establish their value, so also James uses economic language as the dominant code to fix the value of characters and ideas in his writing" (1). Paradigmatic of this attitude, McCormack argues (3), is Madame Merle's proclamation that she does not know "'what people are meant for,'" but, rather, that she only knows what she "'can do with them'" (PL I 345).

Ned Rosier utilises this economic language perfectly: he likens Pansy to an "admirably finished . . . Dresden-china shepherdess" (PL II 90) and tries to entice Madame Merle into his service by bribing her, albeit surreptitiously, with "two or three of the gems" in his collection of *bibelots* (PL II 99). As Serena Merle proclaims, for a love-sick swain, he certainly has his eyes about him (PL II 96). Rosier also knows how to interpret the monetary language of society. When Isabel informs him, for example, that Osmond had a collection of aesthetic objects before he had "the advantage of her advice," Rosier correctly deciphers her words. As he says to himself, "For 'advice' read 'cash'" (PL II 101).

James skilfully manipulates the economic language of society in The Portrait. He fills the exchanges between its members with dissembling words that at once confuse the distinction between people and objects, moral and financial values. Just as Rosier knows the current market value of his possessions, so the words used to define his character are quantitative. As he himself admits, he is not worth much in Osmond's estimation: "'I'm afraid that for Mr. Osmond I'm not--well, a real collector's piece,'" he argues (PL II 92). More noteworthy is the meeting between these two cosmopolitan collectors. Consider, for example, how Osmond wards off Ned Rosier: "'No, I'm not thinking of parting with anything at all, Mr. Rosier'" (PL II 104). His statement, remarkable for its air of negation and closure, comes in the midst of a superficial discussion about aesthetic objects. What he really means is that he will never consent to give Pansy away to her importunate suitor--not that he is unwilling to sell his "'old pots and plates'" (PL II 104). The association between his daughter and his collection of objects makes Pansy a commodity to be appraised financially and sold. As Osmond later tells Isabel, he sets a great "'price'" on his daughter (PL II 121). His interest is economic, more than personal. As

Peggy McCormack argues, the calculating members of society immediately set "prices upon characters' merchandizable assets such as physical attractiveness, mental acuity, culture, title, or money itself" (2). The drawing room becomes a "linguistic market place" (4).

A CHARACTER OF DISTINCTION

Yet, as James reveals in The Portrait, Isabel can be neither known nor owned exclusively by society. From the very beginning of the novel, James distinguishes her character from her common acquaintances. Even though Isabel shares and enjoys all of the entertainments of girls her age--"kindness, admiration, bonbons, bouquets, the sense of exclusion from none of the privileges of the world she lived in" (PL I 46)--she is a figure of distinction. She is a complex character who is appreciated properly only by refined tastes and intellects--a group of connoisseurs, the narrator implies, which includes the reader. While nineteen persons out of twenty pronounce Edith, her sister, infinitely prettier than Isabel, the twentieth has the advantage, the narrator adds, "of thinking all the others aesthetic vulgarians" (PL I 44-45).

While other girls "frisk and jump and shriek" (PL I 44), Isabel delves into literature. She is a "person of many theories [whose] imagination [is] remarkably active"

(_PL_ I 66). James appraises her intelligence and deep character at the expense of the superficiality of New York society. Consider the Misses Climbers. While they enter the novel parenthetically as friends of Henrietta Stackpole, their scheming social temperaments are betrayed by their allegorical names. A more emphatic antithesis to Isabel, however, is Mrs. Varian, her paternal aunt. As the narrator exposes the lady's reading habits,

> Practically, Mrs. Varian's acquaintance with literature was confined to _The New York Interviewer_; as she very justly said, after you had read the _Interviewer_ you had lost all faith in culture. Her tendency, with this, was rather to keep the _Interviewer_ out of the way of her daughters; she was determined to bring them up properly, and they read nothing at all. (_PL_ I 66-67)

The hypocrisy in this passage is evident: Mrs. Varian surfeits her relish for gossip, but starves the social appetites of her daughters. (The absolute benightedness of her daughters is hardly likely, however, since Mrs. Varian stocks her shelves with "novels in paper.")

Isabel, on the other hand, is not a "regular student of the _Interviewer_" (_PL_ I 71): life and literature are her main interests. Yet, as the narrator explains, Isabel is not bookish: she "had a great desire for knowledge, but she really preferred almost any source of information to the printed page; . . . She carried within herself a great fund of life, and her deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movements of her own soul and the agitations of the world" (PL I 45).

Isabel's imagination flickers with almost Paterian intensity. She is so curious about life that, in order to embrace its fullness, she feels she has to experience both pleasure and pain. Feeling that the unpleasant has been "too absent from her knowledge" (PL I 42), she tries to convince Lord Warburton that it is her fate to encounter misfortune: "'I can't escape unhappiness,'" she says. "'In marrying you I shall be trying to'" (PL I 186). Her character is frustratingly complex. As the narrator has cause later to write, even "Suffering, with Isabel, was an active condition; it was not a chill, a stupor, a despair; it was a passion of thought, of speculation, of response to every pressure" (PL II 189). Even in adversity, Isabel's flamelike consciousness quickens and brightens: unwilling to fall short of her romantic ideals, she discriminates "some passionate attitude" every moment of her existence (Renaissance 237). The intensity with which she burns would have impressed, if not mystified, "faint, pale, embarrassed" Pater (Letters III 492).

REFUSING TO BE FRAMED

The portrait that James draws of Isabel is so sentient, vital, and complex that it transcends its social frame; her character cannot be fixed. As Ralph Touchett realises early in the novel, no one will, "'in any way, be easily right about her'" (PL I 58). She is not only "better worth looking at than most works of art" (PL I 61), she is also invaluable. "'A character like that,'" he says to himself, "'a real little passionate force to see at play is the finest thing in nature. It's finer than the finest work of art'" (PL I 86).

Ralph makes the mistake of trying to objectify his cousin: he thinks he can hang her portrait on the wall and appraise its strengths whenever he chooses. He imagines that he has been given "'the key of a beautiful edifice'" and has been told "'to walk in and admire'" (PL I 86). Yet, as the narrator notes,

> it was not exactly true that Ralph Touchett had had a key put into his hand. His cousin was a very brilliant girl, who would take, as he said, a good deal of knowing; . . . He surveyed the edifice from the outside and admired it greatly; he looked in at the windows and received an impression of proportions equally fair. But he felt that he saw it only by glimpses and that he had not yet stood under the roof.

> The door was fastened, and though he had keys in his pocket[,] he had a conviction that none of them would fit. (PL I 86-87)

Ralph tries to make a spectacle of Isabel as he does of "'the game of life'" (PL I 210): he has paid the price of admission, he claims, and wants only a good seat to enjoy the show. As Jonathan Freedman writes in Professions of Taste,

> Despite his own desire to do otherwise, Ralph is forced by the very structure of his perception to reify and then aestheticize Isabel, to treat her with the detached but appreciative vision of the discerning connoisseur. The novel clearly demonstrates the negative consequences of such an aestheticizing vision --even so generous a vision as one that compares Isabel to a Titian. Ralph thinks he can respond to Isabel as he would to a work of art, with energetic detachment and consummate disinterestedness. But he is forced to discover that this is impossible . . . Isabel challenges his disinterestedness by doing what paintings cannot: by growing and changing along the idiosyncratic lines of her own character. (155)

Isabel cannot easily be known. Her character flickers and changes while James continually retouches his verbal portrait.

Even the narrator is perplexed by her character. He confesses on one occasion that "Our heroine's biographer" cannot tell why she blushes (PL I 154); and, on another, he cannot fathom the "working of this young lady's [strange] spirit" (PL II 22). In each case, neither the narrator nor Isabel, herself, can explain the unpredictability of her nature; they are each afraid of her mind and what it might do. "I can only give it to you as I see it," the narrator adds in a metafictional aside, "not hoping to make it seem altogether natural" (PL II 22). As Henrietta Stackpole declares, Isabel is "'intensely real'" (PL I 169).

REFUSING TO BE DEFINED

Isabel refuses to be defined or appraised by her possessions. Money is a liability, a social tether, that ties her character down. As she resolves early in The Portrait, "she [will] be what she appear[s], and she [will] appear what she [is]" (PL I 69). There is no artifice in her character. When Madame Merle informs her that all human beings have shells that must be taken into account--by which she means the envelope of circumstances and accessories that surrounds an individual--Isabel fervently replies that nothing expresses her character better than herself. "'Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me,'" she declares; "'everything's on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one'" (PL I 288). As she continues,

> 'Certainly the clothes which, as you say, I choose to wear, don't express me; and heaven forbid they should!
>
> '. . . My clothes may express the dressmaker, but they don't express me. To begin with, it's not my own choice that I wear them; they're imposed upon me by society.' (PL I 288).

Isabel speaks impetuously and naively. In contrast, the forces of convention are so strong and well-established that they stifle her grandeur. As Madame Merle asks, with an air of finality, "'Should you prefer to go without [clothes]?'" (PL I 288). Her experienced voice of reason and scepticism is victorious in this scene. But Isabel has the last word--the final point of view--in The Portrait.

Whereas Madame Merle is so much "overlaid by custom" that her angles are almost entirely "rubbed away" (PL I 273-74), Isabel remains the "'most charming of polygons'" (PL I 213). She cannot be fitted squarely into the vice-like grip of society. When Ned Rosier meets her in Paris, for example, he warns her about her expressive face. Knowing that she spurns his fetish for lace and fine china, he tells her, "'You think I'm a mere trifler; I can tell by the expression of your face--you've got a wonderfully expressive face. I hope you don't mind my saying that; I mean it as a kind of warning'" (PL I 308). The cosmopolitan world in The Portrait is constructed around screens. There is no room either for sincerity or for integrity. Yet, even despite the attempt of Gilbert Osmond--the ultimate poseur--to possess her character, Isabel eludes capture.

GILBERT OSMOND

Osmond is characterised by masks and defined by negation. As the narrator represents his villa, "It was the mask, not the face of [a] house. It had heavy lids, but no eyes" (PL I 325). Even Pansy has a "finish that [is] not entirely artless" (PL I 367). Modelled after Du Maurier's languid, slouching aesthetes in Punch (Freedman 147-150), Osmond is ruled by appearances. Everything is in keeping with his taste--the "keynote" of his reified existence (PL I 377). Yet his objects do not express his individuality; in fact, there is no depth to his character. He is, as Peggy McCormack observes, a "counterfeit" whose artful appearance is "emptied . . . of any real value" (Rule of Money 24). Although he is likened to a "fine gold coin [with] no stamp nor emblem of the common mintage," his currency is worthless (PL I 329). He is described by negation. As Madame Merle refers to him early in the novel, he has "'No career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything'" (PL I 281). Isabel characteristically responds too generously to his poverties. She trusts that his lack of attributes conversely betokens a resolute, valuable mind. As she proclaims, it is the "'total absence of all these things'" that pleases her most about his character (PL II 74). She supplies "the human element" that is genuinely missing from his nature (PL I 383).

Yet, as Isabel (as Mrs. Osmond) gradually realises, Osmond's connoisseurship and posture of indifference are merely veneers that attempt to hide his superficiality. In truth, Osmond is an "'aesthetic sham'" (Freedman 151) who is governed, not by fine appreciation, but by convention. As Isabel discovers,

> But this base, ignoble world, it appeared, was after all what one was to live for; one was to keep it for ever in one's eye, in order not to enlighten or convert or redeem it, but to extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority. On the one hand it was despicable, but on the other it afforded a standard. (PL II 197)

Just as Osmond derives more satisfaction from excluding people from his wife's Thursday evenings than from the company of those present (PL II 292), so he dismisses the tastes and opinions of others with disdain, even while he is a slave to society. As Ralph discerns, Osmond lives exclusively for the world:

> Far from being its master as he pretended to be, he was its very humble servant, and the degree of its attention was his only measure of success. He lived with his eye on it from morning till night, and the world was so stupid it never suspected the trick. (PL II 144)

Osmond is all disguise and no substance. As Ralph considers, everything he does is a pose--a "*pose* so subtly considered that if one were not on the lookout one mistook it for impulse" (PL II 144-145).

HIS PRIZED POSSESSION

Osmond commodifies Isabel in The Portrait by transforming her character into an advertisement for his tastes and attitudes. As he complains to Madame Merle, early in the novel, Isabel has only one fault: she has "'Too many ideas'" (PL I 412). He tries to restrain her individuality by nullifying her ideas. "What could be a happier gift in a companion," he muses, "than a quick, fanciful mind which saved one repetitions and reflected one's thought on a polished, elegant surface?" (PL II 79). As he ponders Isabel's function in his service,

> this lady's intelligence was to be a silver plate, not an earthen one--a plate that he might heap up with ripe fruits, to which it would give a decorative value, so that talk might become for him a sort of served dessert. He found the silver quality in this perfection in Isabel; he could tap her imagination with his knuckle and make it ring. (PL II 79)

Osmond tries to make Isabel into an object that reflects and echoes his own ideas. His solipsism is obvious: in order to make himself shine more brightly, he extinguishes the sparks of Isabel's vibrant personality. As Gilbert sardonically tells Caspar Goodwood, he and his wife are as united "'as the candlestick and the snuffers'" (PL II 309): slowly and malignantly, he puts the lights out, one by one (PL II 190).

The nadir of The Portrait occurs when Isabel, once so full of life, becomes the property of Gilbert Osmond. Wearing a mechanical expression, a mask that covers her entire face, she appears before Ralph as the dull embodiment of her husband, an ornament from his collection. Ralph is lost in wonder at the transformation:

> Poor human-hearted Isabel, what perversity had bitten her? Her light step drew a mass of drapery behind it; her intelligent head sustained a majesty of ornament. The free, keen girl had become quite

> another person; what he saw was the fine lady who was supposed to represent something. What did Isabel represent? Ralph asked himself; and he could only answer by saying that she represented Gilbert Osmond. (PL II 143-44)

Osmond is "a vulgar adventurer" (PL II 330): he marries Isabel for her inheritance. Without money, she is an attractive, intelligent character, but with money, she is a valuable commodity--an object to be sought after and possessed. Isabel's fortune proves her undoing. Whereas she convinces herself early in the novel that her money will be a liberating agent--a "part of her better self" (PL I 321-22)--it becomes her "burden" and gradually chains her to convention (PL II 193). As the Countess Gemini laments, "'Ah, my dear, . . . why did you ever inherit money?'" (PL II 371).

TRANSCENDING THE SOCIAL FRAME

Although Osmond objectifies Isabel's body, he fails ultimately to possess her spirit. He never approaches a real understanding of her character. Beneath his mask of composure, he quakes violently with jealousy--a rage that swells beneath his superficial exterior and that is symbolised, perhaps, by the cracked cup (PL II 336-38). He frets continually over his inability to read her mind, to know her thoughts. Yet Isabel is not exempt, herself, from feeling the satisfaction of ownership: "The finest--in the sense of being the subtlest--manly organism she had ever known," she realises, "had become her property" (PL II 194). When Osmond fails to snare Lord Warburton as a prospective husband for Pansy, moreover, Isabel recollects with triumph that "she had once held this coveted treasure in her hand and felt herself rich enough to let it fall" (PL II 264). Nevertheless, money does not corrupt Isabel; money corrupts the society that attempts to own her.

James ultimately frees the portrait he draws of Isabel from its social frame. She is, at once, too simple and too complex for the world ever to own or to appreciate her character. She is a paradox: she is either so scrupulous that she cannot extricate herself from the machinations of society or she is so magnanimous that the world tries to take advantage of her. As the Countess Gemini tells her, "'You seem to have so many scruples, so many reasons, so many ties . . . [and yet] with you one must dot one's i's'" (PL II 362-63). As she exclaims with disbelief, "'My poor Isabel, you're not simple enough'" (PL II 362).

THE INWARD FLAME

Early in The Portrait, Isabel tells Ralph that she wishes to touch the cup of experience without becoming intoxicated; insofar as she is a "'sentient being,'" she believes, there is no distinction between seeing and feeling (PL I 213). Yet, throughout the novel, Isabel suppresses her emotional language: she never allows herself fully to surrender to her feelings. Near the end of The Portrait, James rekindles her consciousness. Sapped of her individuality by the mask she has been forced to wear, Isabel suddenly springs to life. She rebukes Madame Merle for the selfish hand the older lady has played in her marriage to Osmond--and whose manipulations have taught her the meaning of the word "*wicked*" (PL II 329)--and she defies Osmond by returning to Gardencourt to attend to dying Ralph. Her spirit is reanimated. As James writes,

> Deep in her soul--deeper than any appetite for renunciation--was the sense that life would be her business for a long time to come. And at moments there was something inspiring, almost enlivening, in the conviction. It was a proof of strength--it was a proof she should some day be happy again. It could n't be she was to live only to suffer; she was still young, after all, and a great many things might happen to her yet. (PL II 392)

Even if she "should never escape," Isabel imagines, "she should last to the end" (PL II 393). As Ralph promises her, moreover, she will "'grow young again'" (PL II 416).

In fulfilment of this prophecy, Caspar Goodwood, in the penultimate scene in the novel, gives Isabel a kiss "like white lightning" (*PL* II 436). Whereas James writes in the 1883 Macmillan edition of *The Portrait* that "His kiss was like a flash of lightning; when it was dark again she was free" (*1883* III 224), he reimagines and reproduces its potency in the New York Edition (1908):

> His kiss was like white lightning, a flash that spread, and spread again, and stayed; and it was extraordinarily as if, while she took it, she felt each thing in his hard manhood that had least pleased her, each aggressive fact of his face, his figure, his presence, justified of its intense identity and made one with this act of possession. So had she heard of those wrecked and under water following a train of images before they sink. But when darkness returned she was free. (*PL* II 436)

There is great energy in this passage. James follows the spread of passion as it takes "possession" of Isabel's body and mind. He recreates a pulsating mesh of sensations: assonance brushes against consonance as her emotions conflict with her reason. The sexually-charged scene--uncharacteristic of James--confirms her revitalised consciousness. Yet Isabel refuses to be owned. Whereas Osmond controls her character as a commodity, Caspar

Goodwood stifles her independence by trying to take emotional possession of her heart. She returns to her husband.

THE PERFECT FINISH: AN OPEN-ENDED CONCLUSION

That Isabel, reawakened to the intensity of life, departs for Rome is indicative of neither defeat nor enclosure. Her departure signifies, instead, her freedom. When Isabel steps into the future, she goes where James chooses not to follow: her portrait evades the frame of the novel. As Mary Cross argues, "_The Portrait_ begins and ends in absence, the absence of Isabel" (65): Isabel confronts the "artifice of the plot" and "throws back on the entire novel its representational presumptions," including its attempt to define her character (69). Isabel, she concludes, denies "the text its authority" (69). Yet, as James himself professes, there is only so much that can be known or represented about a character. As he writes in _Notebooks_,

> The obvious criticism of course will be that it is not finished--that I have not seen the heroine to the end of her situation--that I have left her *en l'air*.--This is both true and false. The *whole* of anything is never told; you can only take what

> groups together. What I have done has that unity--it groups together. It is complete in itself. (15)

The open-ended conclusion of The Portrait anticipates James's declaration in "The Art of Fiction" (1884)--his artistic treatise--that novels should not supply happy endings simply to please the taste of the multitude. Too complex to fit within the boundaries of the narrative, Isabel's character transcends not only its social frame, but also the confines of the page.

But perhaps the most insightful interpretation of the ending of The Portrait appears in Professions of Taste. As Jonathan Freedman argues, James deliberately frees Isabel from her portrait in order not to objectify her character the way that Osmond and society try to do in the novel. He writes:

> If James is like Osmond in enmeshing Isabel in a plot whose goal is to aestheticize her, to transform her into a static, frozen portrait of a lady[,] . . . he can demonstrate himself to be a non-Osmondian author only by opening up the plot: by refusing the consolation of closure, whether comic, ironic, or tragic. (165)

This final gesture to release Isabel from the reification of Osmond and society, Freedman concludes, "acknowledges Isabel's ability to transcend any one vision that tries to fix or define her--even the author's own ostensibly omniscient vision" (166).

"[T]o catch the tint of [a psychological] complexion," James writes in "The Art of Fiction" (1884), "might inspire one to Titianesque efforts" and should be considered, therefore, a worthwhile enterprise for the novel (AC 179). Just as James pinpoints the language of aesthetic sensation in the New York Edition of Roderick Hudson, so he delves into the consciousness of character in The Portrait of a Lady and represents its many shades and hues. Yet even as James perfects the form of the novel, he exposes how the society appreciates objects only according to their financial or commodified values.

As I argue in this chapter, the verbal portraits that James draws of Christina Light and Isabel Archer transcend their social frames. They refuse to be defined or limited by the reifying vision of the world. Their characters likewise elude the reader's curious inspection. Like the Impressionist paintings which seem to disintegrate into colourful activity upon closer inspection, no longer contained by a recognisable outline, James's characters experience fluctuations of feeling and mood within their own literary frames. Recreating the blushes of folly and the glares of resentment in each portrait, James enables his characters to radiate their personalities beyond the boundaries of society and the confines of the printed page. His portraits move beyond their frames.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MOST PRODIGIOUS OF LITERARY FORMS: *THE AMBASSADORS*

In my first two chapters, I argue that James refines his art of fiction by redefining his language of aesthetic sensation and by elaborating his portraiture of character and consciousness. As I discuss in Chapter One, James progresses from the imprecise vocabulary of the nascent novelist in the first edition of *Roderick Hudson* to the more sophisticated technique of the master artist in the 1907 edition of the novel: he replaces such terse, but vague, keywords as "picturesque" and "beautiful" with elliptical expressions that depict, in charged Pateresque language, the full complexity of a particular moment or impression. As I argue, this development in James's style made his writing at once less popular with the reading public and yet more innovative and comprehensive in its treatment of consciousness.

In Chapter Two, I argue that a similar specification of language and technique animates James's characterisation of Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*. As I maintain, James complicates his psychological portrait of Isabel to reveal how the society fails either to know or to own her character. In short, my thesis is that James refashions the form of the novel, even as he exposes in his writing how the contemporary society--represented by such figures as Mrs. Light, Madame Merle, and Gilbert Osmond--vulgarises aesthetic experience by reducing people and works of art to marketable commodities. He distinguishes his own aesthetic craft from the tastes of the consumer culture he critiques in his fiction.

In this chapter, I shall argue that James reaches the pinnacle of his aesthetic form in The Ambassadors--a novel which he considered to be "frankly, quite the best, 'all round,' of all my productions" (AM I vii)--by skilfully manifesting the ideas of artistic form which he devised in "The Art of Fiction" (1884). For within the highly-wrought artistic frame of the novel, James renders the evolving perception of reality. He neither dulls the intensity of Strether's impressions nor stills the mutability of his existence. Instead, he catches "the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life" (AC 177).

But The Ambassadors is more than an exemplary model of Pater's hard, gemlike flame, which contains within a finite form the ephemeral quality of existence. Strether's constant attempts to reconcile his fanciful vision to the shortcomings of reality are also analogous to James's attempts to propose a new aesthetic direction for the novel. Just as Strether is often frustrated when the actual moment fails to live up to his expectations, so James, throughout his career, was disappointed when the writers, critics, and readers of the literary marketplace failed to respond positively to his artistic innovations. While Strether and James are each demoralised by the failure of reality to raise itself to the demands of their art, they nevertheless "square" themselves to the affairs of the real world. As I shall argue, the penultimate scene in The Ambassadors--in which Strether implores Chad not to forsake Madame de Vionnet--may also be interpreted as James's parting injunction to the literary marketplace not to forsake his own art of fiction.

FROM THE "ART OF FICTION" TO THE AMBASSADORS:

JAMES AND THE LITERARY MARKETPLACE

"The Art of Fiction" (1884) was written at a pivotal stage in James's career when he was flush with popularity and commercial success. The Portrait of a Lady (1881) had been a "critical success" and was "reasonably profitable in book form" (Sedgwick 317), while, in 1878, "Daisy Miller" had proven immensely popular, selling 20,000 copies within weeks of its publication in the United States. This total was unprecedented for James and one he was never again to equal or approach, but the sales of "Daisy Miller" made him only $200 profit, since Harpers chose to publish the tale in a cheap format--paper wrappers--for only twenty cents a copy (Anesko 43).

"The Art of Fiction" was calculated by James not only to be an aesthetic rejoinder to Walter Besant's lecture and pamphlet of the same name, but also to be a professional enterprise. As Michael Anesko points out, by emphasising that an author should be allowed his or her own choice of subject matter and that a novel should be appraised more for its treatment of an idea than for its story, plot, or ending, James was attempting "to prepare the reading public for the new kind of fiction that [he] was about to attempt" (88). He was attempting, in short, "to educate and expand his own limited audience and so [to] ensure his own artistic freedom" (88).

James's decision to publish "The Art of Fiction" in Longman's Magazine was deliberate. As N. N. Feltes writes, by publishing his aesthetic treatise in this periodical, James was "making his case before [a] 'popular' audience, with a middle-class appetite and taste . . . for 'agreeably informative articles'" (79). Like the initial editors of the Atlantic Monthly who felt that their high standards of fiction and strong literary criticism could "discourage [the] commercial cheapening of literature" (Sedgwick 325), James upheld the "Arnoldian belief that literature can never be healthier than the critical context which nurtures it" (AC 252). He believed that, through such articles as "The Art of Fiction," he and other writers might establish a "community of discussants" (AC 186) and so refashion the form of the novel, improve the function of criticism, and raise the taste of the public. By publishing his essay in Longman's, James was able to reach a large audience. Not surprisingly, when "The Art of Fiction" was subsequently pirated by the "marauding Boston firm of Cupples, Upham & Company," James welcomed this additional exposure: "'the reproduction (partial or entire) of that article in the U.S. will have done me more good than harm,'" he wrote, "'as it will have advertised my fictions!'" (Anesko 164).

Yet James never again experienced the same commercial success that had greeted "Daisy Miller" and The Portrait of a Lady. His socially-minded novels of the next decade--The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima, and The Tragic Muse--all failed to hit their mark. The novels which James had hoped would herald a triumphant second stage in his career and which he believed would prove superior to his previous works (Letters III 21) actually served to alienate him from such periodicals as The Century and the Atlantic Monthly. In fact, R. W. Gilder, the editor of The Century, which had serialised The Bostonians in 1885-86, went so far as to inform James that "'they had never published anything that appeared so little to interest their readers'" (Sedgwick 319).

The monthlies that James had previously relied on to serialise his longer fiction and which had been his major source of income gradually refused to accept his work: his novels frequently exceeded the number of instalments agreed upon by the magazines and James's sophisticated style often proved unremunerative, especially since James had used the commercial success of "Daisy Miller" and The Portrait to raise the selling price of his fiction. Each instalment of his novels cost the periodicals more money than either his name or his aesthetic prestige brought in. In an attempt to compete with the more lucrative cheap magazines that had larger circulations and dominated the market, such journals as the Atlantic Monthly began to opt for commercial, best-selling serials that, though inferior in literary value to James's work, were nevertheless more popular and hence more profitable.

The second phase of James's career, which spanned the decade of the 1880s, was marked by his diminishing success. "Although the 'torrent' of James's prose came in a great flood of print," Anesko writes, "the author's royalties, by comparison, were reduced to a trickle" (121). Macmillan had maintained a friendly business relationship with James and had often given in to his upstart demands for financial advances and sizeable royalties. But with the successive failures of The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima, the publisher offered fewer incentives for the rights to James's fiction--so often had the house of Macmillan not recovered from the sale of James's novels the sum the firm had advanced to the author. In fact, by the end of the decade, James was forced to utilise one of the first literary agents, A. P. Watt, in order to place The Tragic Muse with any degree of profit--again with Macmillan, but on much more stringent terms than before (Anesko 130). As Ellery Sedgwick writes, with the mediocre reception of his works, the bankruptcy of his original Boston publisher, James R. Osgood, his reduced income, and the decline in the demand for his fiction, "James was never again to enjoy [the same] degree of confidence in his ability to win a popular . . . audience and command its financial rewards" (318).

To try to recover his popular acclaim, James ventured into the theatre between 1890 and 1895. As he wrote to William Dean Howells in January 1891, "'It isn't the love of art and the pursuit of truth that have goaded me into such miry ways[,] . . . it is the definite necessity of making, for my palsied old age, more money than literature ever consented or evidently *will* ever consent to yield me'" (Anesko 21). Earlier, in 1882, James had dramatised "Daisy

Miller" in an attempt to capitalise on the success of his tale; he even gave *Daisy Miller: A Comedy* a happy ending to make the play more agreeable. Following this first venture into the theatre, his stage version of *The American* (1891) was met with outbursts of applause (Anesko 19-21).

By 1895, James had decided to rest both the fortune and the future of his theatrical career on the success of his new play, *Guy Domville*. The drama of his failure and disillusionment is well known. Too nervous to sit through his own play, James witnessed, instead, the opening night of Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*--a play he considered to be "crude, clumsy, feeble, [and] vulgar," but which proved to be immensely popular with the public (Edel IV 78). In comparison, when he returned to St. James's Theatre, where the curtain had just fallen on the final act of his own play, James was met, not with an ovation, but with "Jeers, hisses, [and] catcalls" (Edel IV 79). *Guy Domville* was a disaster, despite James's conviction and Arnold Bennett's confirmation that the first act was "studded with gems of dialogue--gems, however, of too modest and serene a beauty to suit the taste of an audience accustomed to the scintillating gauds of Mr. Oscar Wilde" (Bennett 216). Scornful of the multitude, but certain of his own aesthetic worth, James endured this scene of public humiliation with fortitude; nevertheless, in 1898, he retired to Lamb House in Rye, away from the friction of the marketplace.

His tales of the same period, 1890-95, are filled with unpopular, suffering artists whose works are either undervalued or overlooked by a fretful, noisy public. Two tales published in The Yellow Book stand out. "The Death of the Lion" (1894) details the financial rise and aesthetic fall of Neil Paraday, an author who "is unable to live without recognition[, but who] is destroyed by the only kind of recognition possible in such an age" (Keating 385; see also Seltzer 162-65) and "The Next Time" (1895) chronicles the career of Ray Limbert, a poor, but talented artist who "all his life is trying . . . to do something *vulgar*, to take the measure of the huge, flat foot of the public," but who cannot make "a sow's ear out of silk purse" (Notebooks 109-110). As Michael Anesko observes,

> The temptation to read these tales autobiographically is almost overwhelming . . . but, unlike his doomed protagonists, James had no intention of being martyred by the marketplace. If the pressure to achieve best-seller status was made more acute by the evolution of a truly mass audience, the same conditions eventually fostered the recognition that smaller, more discriminating publics existed in tandem with it and might be capable of supporting writers of distinction.

> Even if James's books didn't sell, his name added an indisputable aura of quality to a publisher's list. (143)

After 1895, James began to use his aesthetic sophistication and commercial unpopularity to his advantage: he recognised and targeted an emerging market for "'the author whom it is fashionable to boast of not understanding'" (Keating 380). With the assistance of James Brand Pinker, his literary agent from 1898, James "came to see that quite a few firms were willing to pay for the privilege of publishing one of the better sort" (Anesko 143).

Bequeathed a modest inheritance in 1893 that lessened his dependence on the marketplace, James concluded his career by concentrating on aesthetic form. Although he financed some of the masterpieces of his "major phase" (1895-1905) by writing such pot-boilers as _The Other House_ and "The Turn of the Screw," he dedicated himself almost uncompromisingly to the pursuit and practice of his art of fiction. _The Ambassadors_ is perhaps the best representative of his later style. The last of his novels to be serialised, _The Ambassadors_ was ironically the first work of fiction to be printed in the _North American Review_--an old, traditional journal that had declined in circulation. As Frank Luther Mott writes in _A History of American Magazines_, "James was far from popular, but he seemed to belong to the North American: 'he has come to his own,' said Life, 'and his own has taken him in'" (257).

THE DISCUTABLE FORM OF THE NOVEL

In "The Art of Fiction," James agrees with the best-selling novelist, Walter Besant, that the novel should be "reputed very artistic indeed" (AC 168). As he proclaims, "It is excellent that [Besant] should have struck this note, for his doing so indicates that there was need of it, that his proposition may be to many people a novelty" (AC 168). James similarly bemoans the fact that the novel has lost its "artistic faith" on the opening page of "The Art of Fiction" (AC 165). As he declares, the English novel is not "*discutable*": fiction has "no air of having a theory, a conviction, [or] a consciousness of itself behind it" (AC 165). But this is where his concurrence with Besant ends: James disagrees with the more profitable novelist about how the novel should be artistically rendered. Whereas Besant reduces his own lecture, "The Art of Fiction," to a series of rules--"as if [the novel] were a work of mechanics" (AC 169)--James complicates both the theory and the practice of the novel.

James tightens the form of the novel, ironically, by loosening the restraints of Besant's "The Art of Fiction." Whereas Besant argues in his 1884 lecture that "characters must be real, and such as might be met with in actual life" (18), that "each figure must be clear in outline" (25), and that each detail in a work should enhance its "clearness of vision" (28), James identifies just two obligations for the novel: "that it does attempt to represent life" (AC 166) and "that it be interesting" (AC 170). By simplifying the rules of fiction, James paradoxically complicates its art. He opens up the novel to greater experimentation in subject matter and form. As he writes, "Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad forms; the most one can affirm is that some of the flowers of fiction have the odour of [realism], and others have not; as for telling you in advance how your nosegay should be composed, that is another affair" (AC 171-172).

In contrast to the "conventional, traditional moulds" of fiction--which, James writes, condemn the novel to an "eternal repetition of a few familiar *clichés*" and which cut short its development (AC 177)--James advocates the freedom of the artist and the text. The reading audience, he argues, should allow the novelist his or her own choice of story and expression; only the finished work should be assessed, insofar as the execution is or is not successful. The form of the novel should be considered after the fact: only once the standard of a work has been indicated, James maintains, can we "follow lines and directions and compare tones and resemblances" (AC 170). As he concludes, "We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his *donnée*: our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it" (AC 175).

In "The Art of Fiction," James simultaneously broadens the scope of the novel and narrows its artistic focus. He increases the dimensions of the novel to incorporate "the whole human consciousness" as its subject (AC 244), but insists that the novel be indelibly formed. In short, the function of the novel is, for James, to represent the flickering sensations of existence without deadening their vitality. He explains:

> Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet. In proportion as in what she offers us we see life *without* rearrangement do we feel that we are touching the truth [of existence]; in proportion as we see it *with* rearrangement do we feel that we are being put off with a substitute, a compromise and convention. (AC 177)

The novelist, James proposes, must endeavour to "catch the colour of life itself" (AC 182) without the conspicuousness of artifice and design. As he argues, "Art is essentially selection, but it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive" (AC 177).

"The Art of Fiction" is not without its boundaries, however. Even as James experiments with the form of the novel, he insists that fiction be finely-crafted. As he writes, "in proportion as the work is successful the idea permeates and penetrates it, informs and animates it, so that every word and every punctuation-point contribute[s] directly to the expression" (AC 178). While he conceives of the novel as an elastic and expansive form, he demands that it be precise and well-fashioned.

"The Art of Fiction" is, in sum, restrictive and all-encompassing. Perhaps the best way to visualise its tenets is by analogy: just as an amoeba has a cellular wall which distinguishes its body from its environment, so James tries to separate the artistic novel from the "overcrowd[ed]" and "vulgarised" context of the literary marketplace (AC 169). Yet just as an amoeba can change its shape by expanding and contracting, allowing pseudopodia to form, so the Jamesian novel is malleable enough to accommodate diverse representations of life. As I shall argue in this chapter, James realises the aesthetic ambitions he raises in "The Art of Fiction" in The Ambassadors. Within the artistic frame of the novel, he reproduces the vitality and unpredictability of experience: life seemingly without rearrangement.

THE ART OF THE AMBASSADORS

Echoes of "The Art of Fiction" reverberate throughout the Preface to the New York Edition of The Ambassadors. As James recollects, the "business" of his major novel is to demonstrate the "process of vision" (AM I vi). "Art deals with what we see," he explains; "But it has no sooner done this than it has to take account of a *process*" (AM I ix). Whereas art is static, knowable, and safe, life is dynamic and involves change and ambiguity (Torgovnick 173, 182).

To catch the fluidity of existence in The Ambassadors, therefore, James devises a "drama of discrimination" (AM I xiii): he focalises the events of the novel through the long-sealed, but recently opened eyes of Lewis Lambert Strether to render the gradual unravelling of experience. Strether is a suitably fallible focaliser. Throughout the novel, he struggles to make sense of what he sees: he attempts to pin down his often contradictory sensations by constructing verbal and conceptual frames to register his experiences. Yet, as James reveals, the real world of the novel seldom, if ever, conforms to his designs. Whenever Strether thinks he knows the truth about a situation, the scene shifts slightly and he has to take into account a new standpoint, a different perspective.

In the opening chapter of The Ambassadors, James introduces several of the thematic threads that he weaves throughout the entire novel. He emphasises the complexity of Strether's consciousness and inaugurates his interest in portraying the lapse of time. "[E]very word and every punctuation-point," in short, "contribute[s] directly to [his] expression" (AC 178). As I argue, Strether never exists simply in the present tense: he looks forwards and backwards, inwards and outwards, but he never sees what is directly before his eyes.

THE FIRST CHAPTER

Time is perhaps the central, prevailing *leitmotif* in The Ambassadors, and James makes a point of revealing how Strether, who has missed so many opportunities in his own life, finds himself suddenly in possession of leisure. As the narrator writes, "he [is] like a man who, elatedly finding in his pocket more money than usual, handles it a while and idly and pleasantly chinks it before addressing himself to the business of spending" (AM I 5). Whereas Waymarsh strikes out against the allurement of the moment with his bouts of "sacred rage" (AM I 46)--in which he uses his hard-earned American cash to purchase expensive, but otherwise valueless trinkets--Strether wavers between his "impulse to plunge" and his "impulse to wait" (AM I 86). While Waymarsh subjugates pleasure to industry, Strether oscillates between action and inertia.

The congestion of the opening paragraph anticipates how Strether actually makes use of his time. The sentences are restless with mental activity, but provide little or no physical movement--an intellectual form of Brownian motion. Strether perpetually roams, fidgets, and wastes time (_AM_ I 23). As Ian Watt observes in his explication of the first paragraph, James inverts the "usual introductory exposition of time, place, character and previous action" by immersing the text immediately in the processes of his hero's mind (302). These thoughts, he notes, "easily and imperceptibly range forwards and backwards both in time and space" (289). In _The Ambassadors_, Strether occupies his time mostly by worrying about how to spend it. As James writes in one of his most comic passages, Strether does little else "but ask himself what he should do if he had n't fortunately . . . so much to do" (_AM_ I 76).

Even from the first sentence of _The Ambassadors_, James indicates how Strether has expectations for the future that do not come to fruition the way he envisions: Waymarsh, we learn, has not yet arrived in Chester. Conjoined with this discovery, however, is the observation that Strether does not feel "wholly disconcerted" by the news (_AM_ I 3). The absence of his friend strikes Strether, instead, with "such a consciousness of personal freedom as he had n't known for years" (_AM_ I 4). Strether is a complex character: while he frequently indulges in postponement, he reproaches himself, just as frequently, for his delay. He makes a pursuit of leisure, but apologises for his inactivity (AM I 39). As the narrator points out at the outset of The Ambassadors, Strether is burdened by a "double consciousness": there is "detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference" (AM I 5).

Although he is alternately surprised and disillusioned by the way things turn out, Strether remains an interested observer of life. He is always on tenterhooks to discover what will happen next, even though he seldom wishes to have a hand in directly shaping the experience. As the opening chapter reveals, Strether is impressionable: his mind is attuned to the impulses of aestheticism and he is open to new sensations. Whereas Waymarsh travels with a "forward inclination" throughout "the ordeal of Europe" (AM I 26), Strether is more inclined to give himself over to "the immediate and the sensible" (AM I 4). Yet Strether rarely succumbs to the attraction of the moment. Whenever he strays too far from his ambassadorial duties, his moral Woollett clock--his conscience--sounds discordantly to remind him of his function and to chastise him for his digression.

Strether's tour of Chester with Miss Gostrey provides a strong instance of this internal debate. While Strether enjoys his "introduction to things" with Maria (AM I 13), he criticises himself for falling "'thus in twenty minutes so utterly'" into her hands (AM I 17). His allegiance to Mrs. Newsome does not allow him to relax. James, of course, exaggerates the accelerated pace at which his hero falls in with Miss Gostrey: there is really nothing out of the ordinary in their coming together. Yet, in the span of just a few pages, Strether repeatedly looks at his watch--his moral compass--as if mechanically to curb his surrender to the magnetic pull of the moment.

Eventually, when he looks at his watch for the fifth time, Maria challenges him. "'You're doing something that you think not right,'" she declares; "'You're not enjoying [the moment], I think, so much as you ought'" (AM I 16). She is correct: Strether is continually torn between his own interests and his obligations to others. In this case, he worries about the jealousy of Mrs. Newsome and even about poor Waymarsh, with whom he feels he should be sharing the experience (AM I 16). Strether also beguiles the pleasure of the moment with his thoughts of the future and the past: just as he is anxious about meeting Chad, so he is beset by his memories of missed opportunities--the failures of the "grey middle desert" in his life (AM I 52). By his own admission, Strether is always considering something other than the thing of the moment (AM I 19). He shakes the "bottle in which life hand[s] him the wine of experience" and finds "the taste of the lees rising as usual into his draught" (AM I 180).

Although Strether later regrets that he has never mastered the "common unattainable art" of taking things as they come (AM I 83), his early excursion with Miss Gostrey in Chester rekindles his vitality and reawakens his senses. By the time he meets up with Waymarsh, he has rediscovered his own "consciousness of the agreeable" (AM I 24). This small shift in his character, introduced in just the first chapter of The Ambassadors, anticipates his larger transformation in the novel. Indeed, Strether's reluctance to become involved with the moment is masterfully reversed by James: the former editor of the Woollett Review progresses from a passive consideration of the world to an active engagement with it. He becomes not only the director, but also the hero, of his life.

WHAT A TANGLED WEB JAMES WEAVES

As James writes in "The Art of Fiction," the idea and form of a work are the "needle and thread" of the literary artist (AC 178): the novel must be elaborately planned and painstakingly embroidered. In The Ambassadors, therefore, James pinpoints "every event and every moment of life to the full complexity of its circumambient conditions" (Watt

292). Amidst the apparent shapelessness of experience, he weaves a pattern of concrete details[1] that gives the novel a materialistic air of reality--what he terms the "solidity of specification" (*AC* 173). The "drama of discrimination" (*AM* I xiii) in *The Ambassadors* occurs, then, as Strether unravels the tangled skein of his existence. It is through his "more or less groping knowledge" of the world that we perceive the events of the novel (*AM* I xv), and it is his growing awareness of the affair between Chad and Madame de Vionnet, as well as his rejuvenated consciousness, that provide the psychological interest in the tale.

Strether is initially at a loss either to fathom or to imitate Miss Gostrey's art of sorting out the loose ends of experience. Whereas she has a talent for finding "dropped thread[s]" and for repairing "ragged edge[s]" (*AM* I 38), he ties himself up in knots. Early in *The Ambassadors*, Strether is astonished by how quickly Maria appraises and sums up his character. Her considerable knowledge of the world is contrasted with his ignorance: before he can even figure out how to hand her his card, she discerns "even intimate things about him that he had n't yet told her and perhaps never would" (*AM* I 11). As James writes,

> [Her eyes] had taken hold of him straightway, measuring him up and down as if they knew how; as if he were human material they had already in some sort

> handled. Their possessor was in truth, it may be communicated, the mistress of a hundred cases or categories, receptacles of the mind, subdivisions for convenience, in which, from a full experience, she pigeon-holed her fellow mortals with a hand as free as that of a compositor scattering type. (AM I 10-11)

The sartorial and typographical similes in this passage are significant. The figures of speech reduce Strether to an object to be assessed like fabric or to be deposited like type. This reifying vision is emblematic of the "commodity display" which pervades The Ambassadors and of which many of the characters are practised consumers (Salmon 43).[2]

Even more impressive in this passage, however, is Miss Gostrey's accuracy. She is "constantly beforehand" with Strether and foresees what he routinely overlooks (AM I 129). In The Ambassadors, she acts as his sounding-board. She helps him to interpret the affairs of the world around him and to determine his own viewpoint in relation to them. As James writes--perhaps rather dismissively--she is "the most unmitigated and abandoned of *ficelles*," whose solitary function is to elicit Strether's perceptions and ideas for the reader (AM I xix). Yet Miss Gostrey also teaches Strether how to "'toddle alone'" (AM II 39). In fact, by the end of the novel, he becomes quite adept at winding up and tucking in the ends of his own designs (AM II 168). He develops an aesthetic dexterity which is accompanied by a semantic change.

AN INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD

As his understanding of the world increases, Strether progresses from the blinkered binaries of Woollett to the more libertine pluralism of Paris. He gradually deciphers the cognizant jargon of Parisian society and modifies both his vocabulary and his ideas to accommodate its variegated palette of impressions. Strether arrives in Europe with a predetermined lexicon: he scrutinises the world according to "'types'" (AM I 53) and ventriloquises the voice of Mrs. Newsome and Woollett "in capitals almost of newspaper size" (AM I 166). Miss Gostrey, however, quickly draws him out: she at once complicates and entices his vision by filling his cup so full of impressions that he gradually disregards his former distinctions. One such instance occurs when he is charmed by her red velvet band. As the eavesdropping narrator notes, Strether is "so given over to uncontrolled perceptions" on this occasion that his imagination takes "fresh backward, fresh forward, fresh lateral flights" of fancy (AM I 50-51). He is so overcome by the influence of the moment that he has "to find [new] names" to comprehend the sensations that overwhelm him (AM I 49). In this case, he discovers the meaning of a "'cut-down'" dress (or so he rather giddily believes the term to be) and realises that, in contrast to the no-frills severity of Mrs. Newsome, Maria Gostrey embodies all of the attractions of the moment (AM I 50).

At the theatre in London, similarly, Strether finds himself enraptured more by the audience than by the play --even though his anxiety for the woman in the yellow frock and the man in "perpetual evening dress" anticipates his future sympathy for Madame de Vionnet and Chad (AM I 53). Whereas Strether realises that there are only two types of people at Woollett--"the male and the female"--he discovers an entirely different cast of characters in the gallery. As he reflects, "the figures and faces in the stalls were interchangeable with those on the stage" (AM I 53). This recurrent theme of display in The Ambassadors is once again encountered when Chad introduces Strether to Parisian society. As the narrator describes the intellectual showmanship and polyglot discussions overheard in the Boulevard Malesherbes,

> Strether had never in his life heard so many opinions on so many subjects. . . . People showed little diffidence about such things . . . and were so far from being ashamed of them--or indeed of anything else--that they often seemed to have invented them to avert

> those agreements that destroy the taste of talk. (AM I 173-174)

The modish Parisian society, like the theatre audience in London, makes a spectacle of itself and its conversation. Yet instead of feeling intimidated by the change in his environment, Strether feels exhilarated by its animation. He recalls how Woollett has opinions on only three or four issues and remembers how, in the past, even he suppressed the urge to challenge its distinctions. Confronted by the chameleonic appearances of society, Strether is forced to reconsider the terms of his discourse: his former Woollett binaries no longer seem able to accommodate the glut of his sensations. As the narrator notes, the atmosphere of Paris tweaks Strether's aesthetic "nerves" and stimulates both his language and his mind (AM I 174).

DISASSEMBLING LANGUAGE AND DISSEMBLING APPEARANCES

In The Ambassadors, accordingly, Strether experiences a syntactic change: he alters his sentence structure and his vocabulary to register the plethora of his impressions. Whereas Waymarsh defies the liberalism of Paris with short admonitory outbursts--"'Look here, Strether. Quit this'" (AM I 109)--Strether begins to string words, sentences, and ideas together more liberally.[3] Consider the following sentence. As Strether confides in Miss Gostrey, Waymarsh "'thinks us sophisticated, he thinks us worldly, he thinks us wicked, he thinks us all sorts of queer things'" (AM I 42). Even in this brief exchange, Strether speaks with a generosity he would not have afforded himself earlier. As the narrator tells us previously, for example, although he "easily consorted" (so far as ease could be imputed to him) with the passengers on board his ship, Strether "had stolen away from every one alike, had kept no appointment and renewed no acquaintance" (AM I 4). The dual attractions of Miss Gostrey and the sights of Chester induce Strether to speak more freely than his wont; his words are charged with an enthusiasm, an openness and a vitality which they previously lacked. Nevertheless, there is a self-conscious tone of reproach in his pronouncement: his accumulation of critical adjectives--"'worldly,'" "'wicked,'" and "'queer'" --expresses his own uncertainty. Strether, it seems, and not just Waymarsh, doubts the propriety of his precipitant acquaintance with Miss Gostrey.

As his familiarity with the world increases, however, Strether's language becomes more tolerant and his voice bespeaks greater contentment. He arrives, albeit haltingly, at an air of complacency. As Strether announces late in the novel, for example, "'I'm true, but I'm incredible. I'm fantastic and ridiculous--I don't explain myself even *to* myself'" (AM II 238). If his utterance sounds somewhat inebriated, it is because he has drunken freely from his cup of experiences: he is in high spirits from a surfeit of new impressions. His character, he seems to say, is just as complex and indescribable as his myriad sensations. While Sarah Pocock continues to interpret the affairs of the world according to the binaries of Woollett, using a language as severe and precise as her vision is narrow and selective, Strether insists that his numerous impressions have opened his eyes and have blurred his old demarcations. As he fretfully explains his transformation, "'Everything has come as a sort of indistinguishable part of everything else'" (AM II 200-1). His response to the disapproval and sudden departure of Sarah--the forementioned exclamation of his singular, prodigious, "'fantastic and ridiculous'" nature--thus signifies his growing renunciation of the terms of Woollett.

Strether, not surprisingly, also experiences a change in his lexicon in The Ambassadors: he gradually deciphers the codes of Parisian discourse and assimilates them into his vocabulary. Miss Barrace and Little Bilham act as his tutors. As Strether reflects on first meeting them,

> It was interesting to him to feel that he was in the presence of new measures, other standards, a different scale of relations, and that evidently here were a

> happy pair who did n't think of things at all as he and Waymarsh thought. (AM I 114)

Miss Barrace and Little Bilham, together, present Strether with an alternate way of perceiving the world and provide him with key words and new expressions for appreciating and interpreting its mysteries. Strether finds himself in "a maze of mystic closed allusions" (AM I 279): he struggles to keep up with their implications and constantly chases after the meanings of the equivocal remarks they let drop. As the narrator notes, Strether is "so often at sea" with his companions that he can only guess at their overtones: "He wondered what they meant, but there were things he scarce thought they could be supposed to mean, and 'Oh no--not *that!*' was at the end of most of his ventures" (AM I 116).

One such telling, ambiguous remark in The Ambassadors is Miss Barrace's characteristic refrain: "'Oh, oh, oh!'" (AM I 204). While Strether realises that there is more to her outrageous hiccough than meets the ear, he cannot fully comprehend its import. Strether is predictably unaware of the true relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet and remains deaf for the longest time to the dissembling discourse of Paris. William Greenslade, on the other hand, does not, and writes in "The Power of Advertising" that Miss Barrace's utterance belies "both the intimacy between

Chad and Madame de Vionnet, and [her] knowledge of that intimacy" (103). Yet Strether gradually incorporates the energetic expressions of Little Bilham and Miss Barrace into his own vocabulary. As the narrator notes, "He found himself in time on the point of telling [Madame de Vionnet] that she was, as Miss Barrace called it, wonderful; but, catching himself up, he said something else instead" (AM I 249). When Strether finally does call Madame de Vionnet "'wonderful!'" (AM II 288), he invests the word with greater meaning and deeper insight than any of the other characters can know: as I shall argue at the end of this chapter, Strether sees Madame de Vionnet as no one else can see her.

Yet the most pressing dilemma for Strether in The Ambassadors is the meaning of the "'virtuous attachment,'" which Little Bilham says exists between Chad and Madame de Vionnet (AM I 180). Strether naively misinterprets the whole affair. In one of the most comic and ironic passages in the novel, he tells Little Bilham that he has made it all out for himself and that he at last understands the nature of their relationship: Chad, he explains, feels indebted to Madame de Vionnet for improving his character and is honourably awaiting the day that she will be free to marry. They have "'such a high fine friendship,'" Strether insists, that their attachment cannot possibly be "'vulgar or coarse'" (AM I 280).

But Strether is far from the truth. Whereas he thinks that the attachment between Chad and Madame de Vionnet is morally virtuous, Chad's more cognizant friends appraise the affair in terms of its aesthetic virtues. As Levi St. Armand argues, the word "virtue" is a portentous signifier in The Ambassadors and has its roots in the Preface to The Renaissance (139).[4] As Pater writes, a "virtue" is the property found in a work of art--as well as in the fairer forms of nature and human life--that affects the observer "with a special, a unique, impression of pleasure" (ix). The cosmopolitan characters in The Ambassadors, therefore, all base their judgements of the "'virtuous attachment'" on how Chad and Madame de Vionnet please the eye, rather than on how their affair agrees with the conscience. They are governed more by their "'visual sense'" than by their moral discrimination (AM I 206). Strether, on the other hand, combines moral foresight with physical short-sightedness: despite the repeated references to his "eternal nippers," he does not see what is directly before his eyes (AM I 11; AM II 7). The "sense of the lurid in the picture" does not enter into his mind until the adulterous affair between Chad and Madame de Vionnet stumbles across his line of vision in the Lambinet landscape (AM I 230).

Yet, as James reveals in The Ambassadors, meanings are ubiquitously elusive. As Little Bilham warns Strether, "'What more than a vain appearance does the wisest of us know?'" (AM I 203). Everything in Paris appeals merely to the eye. As Miss Barrace observes, "'one sees [only] what things resemble,'" not what they really are (AM I 207). The same irresolution that clouds Strether's understanding of the relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet also obscures his awareness of the city. The intangible quality of Paris is introduced by James in the following evocative and immensely Paterian description:

> It hung before him this morning, the vast bright Babylon, like some huge iridescent object, a jewel brilliant and hard, in which parts were not to be discriminated nor differences comfortably marked. It twinkled and trembled and melted together, and what seemed all surface one moment seemed all depth the next. (AM I 89)

As William Greenslade observes, "The jewel is an aesthetic symbol of the central problem of knowing and judging the experience of Paris. . . . The image of 'Babylon' strikes the seductive note which enforces our sense that its moral ambiguity lies in what it does or does not display to the sight" (100). Richard Salmon, moreover, notes that James's Paris has its own epistemology which works on the "apparent disavowal of mere ostentation" (45). Nothing in Paris is what it seems: appearances deceive and language constantly dissembles. In The Ambassadors, consequently, Strether discovers that the outlines by which he tries to grasp his experiences dissipate when his actual involvement with the world increases.

BLURRING OUTLINES:

LETTING THE PRESENT COMPOSE ITSELF

In The Ambassadors, Strether strives to keep himself "squared" to his new experiences (AM I 111). He tries--at least initially--to make sense of what he sees by reducing everything around him to binaries or absolutes. As he asks Chad on one occasion, for example, "'Excuse me, but I must really . . . know where I am. Is she [Madame de Vionnet] bad? . . . Is her life without reproach?'" (AM I 239). Strether tries to find stasis in a world full of ephemeral and mutable impressions. As William Greenslade observes, he tries to compose a view of the world "in which surface and depth emerge as stabilizing determinants of a whole right way of seeing. To see people he must compose them" (101). Yet as Miss Barrace responds to Strether's quest for truths, "'Oh I like your Boston "reallys"!'" (AM I 207). Nothing in Paris, she argues, can be clearly or reductively defined. The more Strether sees, the more he sees other things (AM I 170): he constantly has to reconsider his boundaries and distinctions. As he later tells Chad, "'Oh if [only] you were worse I *should* know what to do with you'" (AM II 35-36). But since neither Chad nor Madame de Vionnet are as bad as Strether expects, all he can do is wait and see how the events of the world around him transpire.

Eventually in The Ambassadors, Strether learns to let each moment compose itself. Gloriani's garden-party is the catalyst of this transformation. If Chad's sudden arrival at the theatre convinces him that the future never unfolds the way he expects,[5] then Gloriani's party illumines what he has missed in his life by not living either as fully or as well as he should. This latter revelation is a double-edged sword for Strether. As he asks himself, "Was it the most special flare, unequalled, supreme, of the aesthetic torch, lighting [the] wondrous world for ever, or was it . . . the long straight shaft sunk by a personal acuteness that life had seasoned to steel?" (AM I 197). Strether is at once inspired by his feeling of aesthetic enlightenment and deflated by his knowledge that life has passed him by. His epiphany is the keystone of The Ambassadors. As James writes in his Preface to the New York Edition of the novel, Strether's exhortation to Little Bilham to "'Live all you can; it's a mistake not to'" is the "germ" that empowers each line of the novel and which unifies the work as a whole (AM I v-vi).

In The Ambassadors, therefore, Strether progresses from trying to structure the world around him to "moving verily in a strange air and on ground not of the firmest" (AM I 266). He comes to appreciate the intensity of the moment. As the narrator chronicles this transformation, "He was building from day to day on the possibility of disgust, but each day brought forth meanwhile a new and more engaging bend of the road" (AM I 257). Strether swallows a dose of his own self-prescribed anodyne and starts to live all he can. He overcomes the "odious ascetic suspicion" of beauty that initially threatens to disrupt his appreciation of Paris (AM I 193) and learns from Little Bilham "the lesson of a certain moral ease" (AM II 163). "[W]ith dormant pulses at last awake," he stops to smell the flowers of sensation (AM I 278). As the narrator notes,

> Strether relapsed into the sense . . . that he was free to believe in anything that from hour to hour kept him going. He had positively motions and flutters of [a] conscious hour-to-hour kind, temporary surrenders to irony, to fancy, [and] frequent instinctive snatches at the growing rose of observation, constantly stronger for him, as he felt,

> in scent and colour, and in which he could bury his nose even to wantonness. (*AM* II 173)

Strether begins to enjoy the moment and to exist simply in the present tense. As he confides in Miss Gostrey, "'I don't get drunk; I don't pursue the ladies; I don't spend money; I don't even write sonnets. But nevertheless I'm making up late for what I did n't have early . . . it's my surrender, it's my tribute, to youth'" (*AM* II 50-51). As the narrator observes, Strether "was letting himself, at present, go; there was no denying it" (*AM* II 64).

Yet even as Strether revels in the moment, he is taken aback repeatedly by unexpected developments and by sudden recollections of what he has either overlooked or not seen. The arranged marriage of Jeanne de Vionnet is one such incident that catches Strether unawares. As the narrator describes his reaction to the news, "Vaguely and confusedly he was troubled by it; feeling as if he had even himself been concerned in something deep and dim" (*AM* II 129). The idea that Jeanne has been used as an object in the marriage marketplace and that she has been advertised to a potential husband disturbs Strether; her marketability undermines his belief that beauty can be neither adulterated nor sold.

The most notable example of how Strether is alarmed by the unfolding of experience, however, is his discovery of Chad and Madame de Vionnet in the country. As I argue, the episode opens up Strether's eyes to a clarity of vision and a depth of perception that none of the other characters in The Ambassadors shares. If Strether is notable, earlier, for what he overlooks, he is remarkable, afterwards, for what he sees.

THE LAMBINET LANDSCAPE

The Lambinet landscape sequence (AM II 245-66) is admirably composed by James to reproduce an impressionistic sense of flux. As the narrator observes, the station where Strether alights from the train is "selected almost at random" from an impulse that is "artless enough" (AM II 245). The haphazardness of the excursion is emphasised from the start. Nevertheless, Strether quickly begins to order the scene. Recollecting a small Lambinet that he had once been tempted to buy, he superimposes his memory of the painting on to the landscape: the poplars and willows, the reeds and river, he finds, all fall "into a composition" within the "oblong gilt frame" of the remembered canvas (AM II 247). Walking through the country, Strether continually expects to bump into "the maroon-coloured wall" of the Boston art dealership--so closely does the actual vista resemble the painting (AM II 247). As Marianna Torgovnick observes, Strether settles into the secure notion that life is as structured and as well-proportioned as art: "The

Lambinet utterly controls his perceptions of the countryside and forms his expectations for what the day will bring . . . he expects his experience to be framed, knowable, [and] predictable, like the remembered painting" (182).

Yet at the crucial moment when all of the elements of the landscape seem to fit together, when "exactly the right thing" happens and a boat drifts into view (AM II 256), the scene shifts slightly and Strether has to take into account a process, a different perspective. The picture moves. As James reveals, the reality of the novel is neither predictable, knowable, nor safe. The pointillistic pink parasol that initially strikes exactly the right balance in the scene becomes a symbol of deception and concealment when the lady raises it "as if to hide her face" (AM II 257). Strether is exposed, first, to the mutability of experience--striking him "like some unprovoked harsh note" (AM II 258)--and then to artifice and design: Madame de Vionnet attempts to "spong[e] over . . . the mere miracle of the encounter" by putting on an act, a performance (AM II 258). As Strether remembers afterwards, she speaks with an "unprecedented command of idiomatic turns" (AM II 260); it is the first glimpse that he has of her worldliness. As Jonathan Freedman encapsulates the chapter, at the very moment when "Strether seeks to 'nail' down his experience for all eternity, to make it withstand the 'wheel of time,' he is disappointed by the capacity of experience to shift and change the very terms that it presents him" (199). This representation of mutability within the hard, concrete frame of the novel is a tribute to James's mature aesthetic skill.

Strether's moment of anagnorisis, however, does not destroy the transformation that has taken place in his character in The Ambassadors. He loses neither his newly-awakened consciousness nor his ability to enjoy the moment; instead, the incident opens up his eyes to insight and clear-sightedness. Strether discerns, first of all, the true nature of the relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet: the attachment has not been morally virtuous, he learns, even if it has seemed beautiful. As he realises, "there had been simply a *lie* in the charming affair--a lie on which [he] could now, detached and deliberate, perfectly put [his] finger" (AM II 262-63). Strether similarly descries the role that he has played in the whole affair, the part that he has assumed within the larger context of Parisian culture. As he reflects, "He was mixed up with the typical tale of Paris, and so were they, poor things" (AM II 271): he suddenly envisions all of the other concocted messages that are exchanged in Paris and all of the secret liaisons to which the post office panders.

But, most importantly, Strether discriminates the true natures of Chad and Madame de Vionnet; he sees them as none of the other characters does. This recognition is prefaced, however, by his disavowal of Mrs. Newsome, whom he comes to view as a "'moral and intellectual . . . block'" (AM II 222). As he describes her character to Miss Gostrey,

> 'She had, to her own mind, worked the whole thing out in advance, and worked it out for me as well as for herself. Whenever she has done that, you see, there's no room left; no margin, as it were, for any alteration. She's filled as full, packed as tight, as she'll hold, and if you wish to get anything more or different either out or in . . . you've got morally and intellectually to get rid of her.' (AM II 222)

Considering James's emphasis in "The Art of Fiction" that characters should not be composed in "blocks" (AC 174), and considering the fluidity of his prose in The Ambassadors, this depiction of Mrs. Newsome is a severe rebuff.[6] That she has "'no imagination'" is the most critical accusation that either Strether or James can make (AM II 223). She has loomed before Strether's vision for so long that he has never been able fully to make her out. He now sees her as she really is--a "particularly large iceberg in a cool blue northern sea" (AM II 223)--cold, impenetrable, and severe.

Madame de Vionnet, on the other hand, is a character of numerous different lights and expressions, whom James initially conceives of as "wonderful and abysmal, strange and charming, beautiful and rather dreadful" (*Notebooks* 574). Throughout the novel, she strikes Strether as much more complex and captivating than the shameless "'apology for a decent woman'" that Sarah Pocock accuses her of being (*AM* II 202). Introduced, suitably, by an oxymoron, Madame de Vionnet leaves Strether with "more and more so mixed" an impression by the end of the novel (*AM* II 284).[7] He sees her as none of the other characters does: he identifies her as desperately devoted to Chad and terrified of losing him. As the narrator describes his contradictory emotions,

> he could think of nothing but the passion, mature, abysmal, pitiful, she represented, and the possibilities she betrayed. She was older for him to-night, visibly less exempt from the touch of time; but she was as much as ever the finest and subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him, in all his years, to meet; and yet he could see her there as vulgarly troubled, in very truth, as a maidservant crying for her young man. (*AM* II 286)

Neither free from artifice nor devoid of dignity, Madame de Vionnet remains an exceptional character, despite her being reduced to a type--a maidservant crying for her young man.

She is, in short, "'wonderful!'" and inspires in Strether a mixture of disappointment, pathos, fondness and respect (*AM* II 288). Whereas Mrs. Newsome and Sarah Pocock remain rigid and narrow in their viewpoints, Strether is given to alterations in perspective and is more accommodating than either of the American ladies. Realising that Madame de Vionnet cares exceptionally for what he thinks of her, he sets out to save her: he implores Chad not to forsake the woman who has so improved his character.

Yet Strether interprets Chad's character differently by the end of the novel. He sees the young magnate as even Madame de Vionnet cannot: he recognises his weaknesses and limitations. Although Madame de Vionnet has noticeably improved Chad's character, he is "none the less only Chad . . . [and] of the strict human order" (*AM* II 284). He is, moreover, his mother's son and has inherited her lack of imagination (*AM* II 244) as well as her "'natural turn for business'" (*AM* II 85). Throughout the novel, Chad sells himself: even in his absence, he makes his presence felt by utilising Little Bilham, Miss Barrace, and his possessions to fill his void. He is very much a character whose value and importance is measured by how others perceive him: he is all appearance, surface and spectacle. As William Greenslade observes, Chad is, in short, the "consummate symbol of the 'roaring age'" of advertising in

The Ambassadors: Madame de Vionnet "'turns [him] out'" and "forms him," while Paris better equips him "to service Woollett's monopolistic business empire" (100).

Not surprisingly, Chad is preoccupied with money and ownership. He reminds Strether repeatedly of the fortune that he will forfeit by remaining in Paris. As he reasons, "'What it literally comes to for you, if you'll pardon my putting it so, is that you give up money. Possibly a good deal of money'" (AM II 239). He does not realise that the Newsome bounty is no longer an issue for Strether, who now derives greater value and satisfaction from his "quickened, multiplied consciousness" (Freedman 196). Chad also fails to appreciate Madame de Vionnet the way that Strether does. When the latter proclaims her "'wonderful,'" for example, Chad responds, "'You don't begin to know *how* wonderful!'" (AM II 68). As James writes, "There was a depth in [his comment], to Strether's ear, of confirmed luxury--almost a kind of unconscious insolence of proprietorship" (AM II 68). Chad speaks of Madame de Vionnet as if she were his property.

The Ambassadors consequently concludes with a sense of despondency and disillusionment for Strether, who realises that he has unwittingly fulfilled his ambassadorial duty by reminding Chad of his business opportunities. As Jennifer Wicke explains, "Strether's final indignity is to suffer being told [that] he is the panderer, the seducer, who has brought [the enticement of advertising back] to Chad" (112). As David Trotter points out, "the reminder that in abandoning Madame de Vionnet [Chad] is doing no more than Strether originally advised him to do is artful only in its brutality. If Strether did collude, naively, with the art of advertisement, he has paid the price. Now, he feels faint" (24). As Strether realises, even if Chad resists his urge to "'boss the advertising'" (AM II 84), he will in all likelihood give in to the temptation "'to make the whole place hum'" with his character (AM II 316-317).

Although Strether is confronted by "the impossibility of stopping the juggernaut of advertising" (Wicke 112), he does not lose sight of his romanticism. As Nicola Bradbury writes,

> The last book of The Ambassadors comes after both illusion and disillusionment. Neither condemnatory nor condoning moral failing, it shows Strether, now "seeing" clearly, coming to terms with human beings as they are, but not accepting their condition as the best conceivable. (62)

While Strether does not believe that the status quo is as virtuous or as commendable as it could be, he is content to take things as they come, if not to improve matters. When Chad applauds "the art of advertisement" at the end of the novel, therefore, Strether beseeches him not to forsake Madame de Vionnet (AM II 315). He appeals first to Chad's humanity, then to his sense of the sacred, and lastly to legality (Bradbury 69). "'You'd not only be, as I say, a brute,'" he tells Chad, should he leave Madame de Vionnet, but "'you'd be . . . a criminal of the deepest dye'" (AM II 311). By imploring him to remain faithful, Strether tries to make the attachment between Chad and Madame de Vionnet as virtuous, aesthetically, as it can be. Nevertheless, as he confides in Miss Gostrey at the end of The Ambassadors, he is not sure that he has "'saved'" either of them (AM II 325).

Strether's predicament is similar to James's struggle within the literary marketplace. Just as Strether tries to improve the world around him, so James tried to remedy "the demoralisation . . . of literature in general" (AC 245) by leading by example: he consistently produced highly-wrought works of art in an attempt to refashion the form of the novel. Yet just as The Ambassadors ends with the suggestion of Strether's departure from Paris--a place of limitless possibilities and endless corruption--like the literary marketplace--so James retired to Lamb House in Rye, unwilling still to have a hand in popular affairs.

If Strether struggles throughout The Ambassadors fully to enjoy the sensations of the moment, he arrives firmly in the present tense at the end of the novel. He pinpoints exactly where he stands in relation to the world around him and remains true to his ideals. He refuses, first of all, to have any further part in the affair between Chad and Madame de Vionnet and chooses, secondly, to end his own passionate, yet platonic relationship with Paris and Miss Gostrey. As he justifies his in/action, he must leave in order to be right: "'That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself'" (AM II 326). Strether's disinterestedness exemplifies both his moral and aesthetic distinction. As Richard Salmon writes, "Pierre Bourdieu has shown how the culturally dominant concept of 'taste' valorizes distance and disinterest from the aesthetic object, by refusing a vulgar, immediate, gustatory consumption" (49).[8] In The Ambassadors, significantly, Strether does not consummate his "visceral" desires (49). Instead, he remains at once a remote, interested, and involved observer of life. As he confides in Miss Gostrey at the end of the novel, "'Then there we are!'" (AM II 327). His declaration is ripe with an understanding of his own transformation, an awareness of the affair between Chad and Madame de Vionnet, as well as a reiterated need for his departure. He appreciates the full complexities of the moment, in short, and exists simply in the present.

CONCLUSION

"[I]f you are able successfully to struggle with [The Ambassadors]," James writes in his correspondence, "try to like the poor old hero, in whom you will perhaps find a vague resemblance (though not facial!) to yours always" (Letters IV 286). James is very much like his creation, Strether. As Leon Edel observes, in the years following the publication of The Ambassadors, James played a similar role to his protagonist in the relationship between William Morton Fullerton and Edith Wharton. In an incredible case of "life . . . imitating art," James, like Strether, acted as a chaperone in their affair; he even helped to facilitate their attachment (Notebooks 299-300). Yet, as I propose, James is most like Strether in his attempt to cultivate a new aesthetic direction for the novel. Just as Strether has expectations for the future that do not unfold the way he envisions, so James was frequently disappointed in his career when the literary marketplace failed to respond favourably, if at all, to his artistic innovations. As I argue, however, James ultimately transcends the failure of the public to raise itself to the demands of his aestheticism: he makes The Ambassadors a tribute to, and a model of, his own art of fiction.

In "The Future of the Novel" (1899), James emphasises that "the future of fiction is intimately bound up with the [quality] of the society that produces and consumes it" (AC 247). Not surprisingly, in his own criticism, James becomes increasingly sceptical of the tastes of the public. As he argues in "The Art of Fiction" (1884), the common reader distrusts art in fiction: "Literature should be either instructive or amusing, and there is in many minds an impression that these artistic preoccupations, the search for form, contribute to neither end, [but] interfere indeed with both" (AC 168). Novels are consumed like puddings, James remarks (AC 165); popular writers simply supply palatable aftertastes (AC 169).

James, on the other hand, refused to cater, himself, to the popular diet. As William Veeder and Susan Griffin point out, he tried, instead, to generate "a community of discussants" that would improve the condition of fiction and that would provide a new aesthetic direction for the novel (AC 186). As Thomas Strychacz explains, "James saw that the diverse constitution of a 'mass' public might guarantee at least the survival of a literary art differentiated from other productions of mass culture." A mature criticism, trained in the subtleties of fiction writing, he hoped, might reach a distinguished audience and "might elevate cultural production to new heights" (78).

James published his treatise, "The Art of Fiction," in Longman's to reach the widest possible audience. Nevertheless, like his other works, James's essay "received little attention" from the public (AC 187): the writers, critics, and readers of the literary marketplace failed to respond positively either to his artistic innovations or to his aesthetic ambitions. As James writes,

> my poor article has not attracted the smallest attention here & I haven't heard, or seen, an allusion to it. There is almost no care for literary discussion . . . questions of form, of principle, the "serious" idea of the novel appeals [*sic.*] apparently to no one, & they don't understand you when you speak of them. (Gard 149)

"The Art of Fiction," as I have said, was written at a pivotal stage of James's career: "The Portrait of a Lady had earned James critical praise as 'the first of English-writing novelists' . . . But increasingly reviewers were expressing weariness with [his] international theme" (AC 184). Marcia Jacobson provides an even more startling statistic in Henry James and the Mass Market. As she writes, The Portrait of a Lady took eleven years to equal the more than seven thousand copies of To Leeward that the best-selling novelist, F. Marion Crawford, sold in just two weeks (154). Throughout his career, James hoped for a similar popular success. He wished that his works would receive not only the literary acclaim, but also the popular credit that he knew they merited; he hoped that his financial returns would one day coincide with his personal investments of time and art. Yet such substantial returns seldom greeted James: if they did, they were more often from his pot-boilers than from his conscious artistic masterpieces. As he laments in a letter to William Dean Howells, for example, "Your account of the vogue of Daisy Miller and the International Episode . . . embittered my spirit when I reflected that it had awakened no echo (to speak of) in my pocket. I have made $200 by the whole American career of D. M. and nothing at all by the Episode" (Letters II 243).

James becomes less tolerant of the reading public and the literary marketplace later in his career. He bemoans "the demoralisation [and] the vulgarisation of literature in general" in "The Future of the Novel" (AC 245) and regrets that the standard of the novelist--if not the potential for the novel--"has dropped" (AC 251). As he writes in "Criticism" (1893), the welfare of the novel suffers from a "free expenditure of ink" (AC 233): mass publications and periodical literature threaten to annihilate the reader's "*faculty of attention*" (Letters IV 250). Novels have become "so accessible," James argues, that the reader "combines with his eternal desire for more experience an infinite cunning as to getting his experience as cheaply as possible. He will steal it whenever he can" (AC 244). The public, he concludes, is "inarticulate, but abysmally absorbent" (AC 242).

As Christopher Wilson argues, the proliferation of mass-market magazines at the end of the nineteenth century created a new "'voice'" for literature (43): "Articles would be well planned, boiled down to readable formats, and consist of 'what is most important to be known of what the world is doing and thinking'" (48), while topical titbits "endlessly enticed and dissatisfied" the reader's attention (64). How could James, who hoped to refine the form of the novel and improve the condition of literature, be popular or even influential when editors and readers, alike, were looking for "a simple, direct, persuasive style akin to everyday speech" (49)?

As Veeder and Griffin discuss the later criticism of James,

> Gone is the conciliatory tone designed to foster a community of discussants. In the seven years since "The Art of Fiction," James had increasingly found isolation rather than communion. His words on criticism had fallen on deaf ears and his innovations

> in fiction had fallen so stillborn that he had abandoned the novel for the theater. (AC 237)

Yet, as I have said, this venture into the theatre proved to be catastrophic for James, whose play, Guy Domville, was jeered at by his audience. As Jean-Christophe Agnew notes, after this unfortunate escapade, James retired to the tranquillity of Lamb House--the "sanctuary built by and for [his] creative imagination" (76). Just as The Ambassadors ends with the suggestion of Strether's departure from Paris, so James removed himself from the site of the literary marketplace. As Marcia Jacobson writes, the distinction between art and popular success that had been "mere bravado" in "The Art of Fiction" was "at the end of the decade . . . a way of life" for James (19).

Yet to think that James was defeated by his lack of popular success and that he entered "the Slough of Despond" after his failure in the theatre is, as Richard Ellmann argues, entirely to miss the mark: James "had in fact too much self-esteem, too much contempt for the London audience and for the plays it admired, to be in any abyss" (225). As Michael Anesko observes, moreover, James "recovered from his humiliation on the stage through the self-prescribed anodyne" of hard work (141). At a time when he "found it increasingly difficult to serialize his work and to find publishers who would take the risk of issuing his books," James published seventeen volumes--the works of his major phase (141-142).

The Ambassadors stands out as an exemplary model of James's art of fiction: "the final and most thoroughly realized example of a distinctively Jamesian aestheticism" (Freedman 193). Within the hard, impeccably crafted form of the novel, James recreates the sentience and mutability of existence. Whereas paintings freeze impressions within spatial and temporal frames, James opens up the form of the novel to render the "impression and illusion of the real *lapse of time*"--"the very most difficult thing in the art of the novelist" (Letters IV 302). Because the novel unfolds as the reader turns the pages--in real time--and because James focalises the events of the novel through the fallible eyes of Strether, The Ambassadors elaborately reproduces the gradual unravelling of experience. A tribute to his own art of fiction, the major novel is James's reminder to the literary marketplace that "the Novel remains still, under the right persuasion, the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms" (AM I xxiii).

The "most prodigious" of settings for his novels and tales, on the other hand, was the New York Edition, which James envisioned would be "selective as well as collective" (Letters IV 371) and would include "freely colloquial" and "confidential" prefaces, offering the reader a history of his works and a "frank critical talk" about his aesthetic concerns and techniques (Letters IV 367). The New York Edition was intended to highlight James's art of fiction and to be a tribute to his uncompromising career, but the edition was also a commercial enterprise. As Stuart Culver writes,

> The New York Edition is, after all, a luxury item and not a scholarly edition of James. The novelist published his works in this format to capitalize on the popularity of a particular kind of publishing commodity; the de luxe edition, which flourished on the subscription market from 1880 to 1910, presented the complete works of noted authors in expensive, ornately-bound and lavishly-illustrated volumes. . . . On this popular view, the obligatory prefatory remarks, provided by the author exclusively for this edition, authenticated the volumes with the force of an autograph, reassuring the buyer that this was in fact a relic of the great man. (115-16)

Michael Anesko likewise analyses the mixed motives of art and ambition behind the "eclectic architecture" of the New York Edition (141). As he explains,

> In light of the disastrous sales history of the New York Edition, most critics have considered that series

> as a kind of monument to James's artistic integrity. Indeed, virtually all James scholars have accepted Leon Edel's argument that the novelist's plan for the Edition, "fixed upon from the outset," was modeled after the twenty-three volumes of Balzac's Comedie Humaine. In fact, the Edition's initial architecture was decidedly more modest. Like so many other works by James, its publication history exemplifies, as the author himself once had occasion to remark, "that benefit of *friction with the market* which is so true a one for solitary artists too much steeped in their mere personal dreams." (143-44)

As Anesko demonstrates, the selection of novels in the New York Edition was influenced as much by the stubbornness of certain publishers, who refused to relinquish their rights to various novels (145, 147, and *passim*), as by James's own desire to include what he considered his best works. James's judgements were also affected by the taste of the reading public. Anesko writes: "Did his audience prefer the earlier manner of such stories as 'Daisy Miller'? Then, he would include them, according to his amanuensis, 'more from a necessary, though deprecated, respect for the declared taste of the reading public than because he loved them for their own sake'" (144). The New York Edition arose from both financial and aesthetic considerations, and thus represents James's last signature within the context of the literary marketplace.

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE.

[1] In this chapter, I refer to two editions of Roderick Hudson: the text of the first English edition, published by Macmillan in 1878, and the text of the New York Edition (1907) which James--the acknowledged Master--considerably revised according to his mature, sophisticated style.

The 1878 edition of Roderick Hudson is reprinted by Penguin Classics (Ed. Geoffrey Moore, 1987). I have chosen this text because it is the earliest, most widely available edition of Roderick Hudson, apart from the more common New York Edition. Any quotations from the Penguin text are made parenthetically in the body of my chapter and are identified by page number alone. Any references to the New York Edition are identified by the abbreviation (RH).

I am aware of one discrepancy: Geoffrey Moore writes that the first English edition of Roderick Hudson was published by Macmillan in 1878. Leon Edel, in his authoritative bibliography on James, states that the English Edition was published as a three decker by Macmillan in 1879. I have used the date given by Moore in an attempt to remain faithful to my primary source. 1878 may refer to the year James submitted the English version of Roderick Hudson to Macmillan, while 1879 may refer to the year the first English edition appeared in print.

[2] The chapter in which Rowland exhibits the statues of Adam and Eve is remarkable, briefly, for its commentary on the marketplace as well as for its "picturesque symbolism" (127). As Rowland observes,

> They were standing before Roderick's statue of Eve, and the young sculptor had lifted up the lamp and was showing different parts of it to his companions. . . . Roderick, bearing the lamp and glowing in its radiant circle, seemed the beautiful image of a genius which combined sincerity with power. Gloriani, with his head on one side, pulling his long moustache and looking keenly from half-closed eyes at the lighted marble, represented art with a worldly motive, skill unleavened by faith, the mere base maximum of cleverness. Poor little Singleton, on the other side, with his hands behind him, his head thrown back and his eyes following devoutly the course of Roderick's explanations, might pass for an embodiment of aspiring candour afflicted with feebleness of wing. In all this Roderick's was certainly the *beau rôle*. (127-28)

In this scene, the figures of genius, consumerism, and hard work meet--the young James clearly preferring the figure of uncompromising talent. But an awareness of the marketplace is also prominent: Gloriani ("an apostle of corruption") and Augusta Blanchard ("she was not above selling her pictures") both taunt Roderick's idealism. As Gloriani tells Roderick, when his passion and inspiration eventually burn out, he will have to adopt the "practical scheme of art"--that is, an active trade that buys into, and profits from, the debased taste of the public (117). Like James, the young sculptor scorns the multitude and proposes, in defiance, to "'make a Christ'" (122). This announcement is significantly ambiguous, since it may refer either to the subject of his next statue or to the life he envisions--away from the marketplace, unwilling to corrupt his art, yet willing to sacrifice himself for the improvement of the public taste. His companions, however, quickly conceive of a companion-piece: Judas. They are not afraid to betray the sanctity of art for the rewards of the money-bag. As Gloriani declares in charged economic language, "'I think the Judas is a capital idea for a statue'" (123).

Roderick is not motivated by pecuniary considerations; instead, he is led astray by his desire to glut his appetite for aesthetic sensations. Nevertheless, the young James, in constructing this scene, demonstrates an astute awareness of the marketplace--one that recurs throughout his fiction.

[3] In this passage, taken from the New York Edition, James elaborates upon the "sad spectacle" Roderick makes in the earlier 1878 text (335). The revision is an example of how James, the Master, refined his aesthetic expression at the end of his career: the 1907 text continues a strand of cup imagery that originates with Roderick's statue of the "naked youth drinking from a gourd" at the end of the first chapter (RH 17) and communicates his loss of inspiration in effective, original, and even symbolic terms.

CHAPTER THREE.

[1] Strether considers himself a fine, but dated "'specimen of the rococo'" (AM I 201) and is an item of much curiosity and interest at Gloriani's garden-party, which is attended by such collectors and connoisseurs. Miss Barrace is a key representative of the commodity display in The Ambassadors. As James describes her, "She seemed, with little cries and protests and quick recognitions, movements like the darts of some fine high-feathered free-pecking bird, to stand before life as before some full shop-window. You could fairly hear, as she selected and pointed, the tap of her tortoise-shell against the glass" (AM I 204).

[2] Such minutiae in The Ambassadors include the green copy of the Woollett Revue, strategically placed in Madame de

Vionnet's drawing-room (AM I 246-247), and the salmon-coloured volume of the Revue later found in Sarah Pocock's rooms (AM II 143). The change in colour is a silent, but telling feature verifying Strether's formal disengagement from Mrs Newsome.

Another detail that may be overlooked is the watch that keeps Mrs Newsome's blue missive from America from blowing idly away. As James writes, "The little blue paper of the evening before, plainly an object the more precious for its escape from premature destruction, now lay on the sill of the open window, smoothed out afresh and kept from blowing away by the superincumbent weight of his watch" (AM II 26-27). If Strether's watch functions as his moral compass early in the novel, then his consciousness of time worries him less and less as his engagement with the world increases. Strether becomes absorbed by the attraction of the present; he begins to lose all sense of time as he fully engages with each passing moment.

The watch motif returns, of course, at the end of the novel when Strether tells Maria Gostrey that he feels like one of the figures of the old clock at Berne which come out at their hour, jig in the public eye, and then retire on the other side (AM II 322).

[3] Even though Waymarsh has a good time in Paris--a truth that is embarrassing for him--he continues to keep up his stern sentence structure. "'Quit this!'" he says again near the end of the novel (AM II 194). Yet, as Strether realises, "It was the conscience of Milrose in the very voice of Milrose, but, oh it was feeble and flat! Strether suddenly felt quite ashamed for him" (AM II 194).

For a longer, more detailed examination of the change in Strether's sentence structure, see Mary Cross 100-125.

[4] While Levi St. Armand makes an insightful connection between the meaning of "virtue" in The Renaissance and the "'virtuous attachment'" in The Ambassadors, I think he entirely mistakes Strether's function in the novel. Levi St. Armand argues that Strether actively and deliberately sets out "to cultivate his own consciousness and to perfect himself as an Aesthete" (137). In contrast, I believe that the awakening of Strether's consciousness is a much more passive process and is marked by vicissitudinous flights and drops, hesitations and plunges (AM II 193). Strether, if anything, is a reluctant aesthete.

[5] This theatrical scene, in which Chad first appears, is skilfully composed by James: he replaces the drama on the stage with the drama inside Strether's head, continuing to

make the consciousness of his hero the central interest in the novel. Once again, the actual moment fails to unfold the way Strether expects. Chad is nothing like the truant he had envisioned. Their meeting, moreover, also does not occur according to plan. As Strether has cause to reflect, "He had frequently, for a month, turned over what he should say on this very occasion, and he seemed at last to have said nothing he had thought of--everything was so totally different" (AM I 149). "But oh it was too remarkable, the truth," he resigns; "for what could be more remarkable than this sharp rupture of an identity? You could deal with a man as himself--you could n't deal with him as somebody else" (AM I 137).

James artfully inverts the theatrical motifs that he threads throughout The Ambassadors; he reveals how Strether passes from being the man at the playhouse of life whose "seat had [already] fallen to somebody else" (AM I 88) to being "'the hero of the drama,'" whose actions everyone is gathered to see (AM II 179). This transformation occurs as Strether begins to let each moment compose itself.

[6] In "The Art of Fiction," James reproves Walter Besant for insisting that characters must be clearly drawn and delineated. As James writes, "That his characters 'must be clear in outline,' . . . [Mr. Besant] feels that down

to his boots; but how he shall make them so is a secret between his good angel and himself" (*AC* 173). As Mark Spilka observes, consequently, James's "The Art of Fiction" "must be one of the mildest (and most devastating) reproofs in literary history" (*Towards a Poetics of Fiction* 198). As I argue, the same cynicism that animates James's reproof of Walter Besant also characterises Strether's response to the block-like rigidity of Mrs Newsome.

[7] Madame de Vionnet first appears dressed in black that is "light and transparent" (*AM* I 210).

[8] Miss Barrace, with her familiar tortoise-shell glasses, is a strong representative of this valorising distance of distinction. Her lorgnettes are at once a symbol of her elevated gaze (holding an object in contempt) and of her consumerist desire (bringing the object more clearly into view).

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